VALERIE UPTON

Margaret L. Greig.

Xmas. 1907.

VALERIE UPTON

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VALERIE UPTON

By

ANNE DOUGLAS SEDGWICK

Author of "The Shadow of Life," "The Paths of Judgment," "The Rescue," "The Confounding of Camelia."

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CHAPTER I

THREE people were sitting in a small drawing-room, the windows of which looked out upon a wintry Boston street. It was a room rather empty and undecorated, but its intense warmth seemed in some degree to furnish it; the idea of austerity was banished by a temperature so nearly tropical. There were rows of books on white shelves, a pale Donatello cast on the wall, and two fine bronze vases filled with roses on the mantelpiece. Over the roses hung a portrait in oils, very sleek and very accurate, of a commanding old gentleman in uniform, painted by a well-known German painter, and all about the room were photographs of young women, most of them young mothers, with smooth heads and earnest faces, and with babies in their arms. Outside, the snow was heaped high along the pavements and thickly ridged the roofs and lintels. After the blizzard the sun was shining and all the white glittered. The national colours, to a patriotic imagination, were pleasingly represented by the red white and blue of the brick houses, the snow and the vivid sky above.

The three people who talked, with many intimate pauses of silence, were all Bostonians, though of widely differing types. The hostess, sitting in an easy-chair and engaged with some sewing, was a girl of about twenty-six. She wore a brown skirt of an

ugly cut and shade and a white silk shirt, adorn with a high linen collar, a brown tie and an old-fas ioned gold watch-chain. Her forehead was too larg her nose too short ; but her lips were full and pleasan and when she smiled she showed charming teet The black-rimmed glasses she wore emphasized th clearness and candour of her eyes. Her thick, fai hair was firmly fastened in a group of knobs down th back of her head. There was an element of the gro tesque in her appearance and in her careful, clums movements, yet, with it, a quality almost graceful that suggested homely and wholesome analogies freshly baked bread ; fair, sweet linen ; the safety an content of evening firesides. This was Mary Colton

The girl who sat near the window, her furs throwr back from her shoulders, a huge muff dangling from her hand, was a few years younger and exceedingly pretty. Her skin was unusually white, her hair unusually black, her velvety eyes unusually large and sombre. In her attitude—lounging, graceful, indifferent—in her delicate face—the straight, sulky brows, the coldly closed lips, the coldly observant eyes—a sort of permanent discontent was expressed, as though she could find, neither in herself nor in the world, any adequate satisfaction. This was Rose Packer.

The other guest, sitting sideways on a stiff chair, his hand hanging over the back, his long legs crossed, was a young man, graceful, lean and shabby. He was clean-shaven, with brown skin and golden hair, an unruly lock lying athwart his forehead. His face, intent, alert, was veiled in an indolent nonchalance. He looked earnest, yet capricious, staunch, yet sensitive, and one felt that, conscious of these weaknesses, he tried to master or to hide them.

These three had known one another since childhood. Jack's family was old and rich, Mary's old and poor, Rose Packer's new and of fantastic wealth. Rose was a young woman of fashion, and her whole aspect seemed to repudiate any closeness of tie between herself and Mary, who passed her time in caring for General Colton, her invalid father, attending committees, and, as a diversion, going to " sewing circles " and symphony concerts ; but she was fonder of Mary than of any one else in the world. Rose, who had, as it were, been brought up all over the world, divided her time now between two continents, and quaintly diversified her dancing, hunting, yachting existence by the arduous study of biology. Jack, in appearance more ambiguous than either, looked neither useful nor ornamental ; but, in point of fact, he was a much-occupied person. He painted very seriously, was something of a scholar, and devoted much of his time and most of his large fortune to intricate benevolences. His shabby clothes were assumed, like the air of indolence ; his wealth irked him, and, full of a democratic transcendentalism, he longed to efface all the signs that separated him from the average toiler. While Rose was quite ignorant of her own country west of the Atlantic sea-board, Jack had wandered west, south, north. As for Mary, she had hardly left Boston in her life, except to go to the Massachusetts coast in summer and to pay a rare visit now and then to New York.

It was of such a visit that she had been talking to them and of the friend who, since her own return home only a few days before, had suffered a sudden bereavement by her father's death. Jack Pennington, also a near friend of Imogen Upton's, had just come

from New York, where he had been with her during the last mournful ceremonies of death, and Mary Colton after a little pause, had said: "I suppose she was very wonderful through it all."

"She bore up very well," said Jack Pennington. "There would never be anything selfish in her grief."

"Never. And when one thinks what a grief it is:—She *is* wonderful," said Mary.

"You think every one wonderful, Molly," Rose Packer remarked, not at all aggressively, but with her air of quiet ill-temper.

"Mary's enthusiasm has hit the mark this time," said Pennington, casting a glance more scrutinizing than severe upon the girl.

"I really can't see it. Of course Imogen Upton is pretty—remarkably pretty, though I've always thought her nose too small; and she is certainly clever; but why should she be called wonderful?"

"I think it is her goodness, Rose," said Mary, with an air of gentle willingness to explain. "It's her radiant goodness. I know that Imogen has mastered philosophies, literatures, sciences—in so far as a young and very busy girl can master them and that very wise men are glad to talk to her; but it's not of that one thinks—nor of her great beauty, either. Both seem taken up, absorbed in that selflessness, that loving-kindness, that's like a higher kind kind of cleverness—almost like a genius."

"She's not nearly so good as you are, Molly. And, after all, what does she do, anyway?"

Mary kept her look of leniency, as if over the half-playful naughtinesses of a child. "She organizes and supports all sorts of charities, all sorts of reforms; she is the wisest, sweetest of hostesses; she takes care

of her brother ; she took care of her father ; she takes care of anybody who is in need or unhappy."

" Was Mr. Upton so unhappy ? He certainly looked gloomy—I hardly knew him ; Eddy, however, I do know, very well ; he isn't in the least unhappy. He doesn't need help.

" I think we all need help, dear. As for Mr. Upton ; you know," Mary spoke very gravely now, " you know about Mrs. Upton."

" Of course I do, and what's better, I know her herself a little. *Elle est charmeuse.*"

" I have never seen her," said Mary, " but I don't see how you can call a frivolous and heartless woman, who practically deserted her husband and children, *charmeuse* ; but perhaps that is all that one can call her."

" I like frivolous people," said Rose ; " and most women would have deserted Mr. Upton, if what I've heard of him was true."

" What have you heard of him ? "

" That he was a bombastic prig."

At this Mary's pale cheek coloured. " Try to remember, Rose, that he died only a week ago."

" Oh, he may be different now, of course."

" I can't bear to hear you speak so, Rose. I did know him. I saw a great deal of him during this last year. He was a very big person indeed."

" Of course I'm a pig to talk like this, if you really liked him, Molly."

But Mary was not to be turned aside by such ambiguous apology. " You see, you don't know, Rose. The pleasure-seeking, worldly people among whom you live could hardly understand a man like Mr. Upton. Simply what he did for civic reform ; worked himself to death over it. And his books on ethics, politics.

It isn't a question of my liking him. I don't know that I ever thought of my feeling for him in those terms. It was reverence, rather, and gratitude for his being what he was."

"Well, dear, I do remember hearing men, and not worldly men, as you call them, either, say that his work for civic reform amounted to very little and that his books were thin and unoriginal. As for that community place he founded at, where was it?—Clackville?—he meddled that out of life."

"He may have been utopian, he may have been in some ways ineffectual; but he was a good man, a wonderful—yes, Rose, a wonderful man."

"And do you think that Molly has hit the mark in this, too?" Rose asked, turning her eyes on Pennington. He had been listening with an air of light inattention, and now he answered tersely, as if conquering some inner reluctance by over-emphasis—

"Couldn't abide him."

Rose laughed out, though with some surprise in her triumph, and Mary, redder than before, rejoined in a low voice: "I didn't expect you, Jack, to let personal tastes interfere with fair judgment."

"Oh, I'm not judging him," said Jack.

"But you do feel with me," said Rose, "that it's no wonder that Mrs. Upton left him."

"Not in the least," Pennington replied, glad, evidently, to make clear his disagreement. "I don't know of any reason that Mrs. Upton had for deserting her children as well as her husband."

"But have they been left? Isn't it merely that they prefer to stay?"

"Prefer to live in their own country? among their own people? Certainly."

"But she spends part of every year with them. There was never any open breach."

"Everybody knew that she would not live with her husband and everybody knew why," Mary said. "It has nearly broken Imogen's heart. She left him because he wouldn't lead the kind of life she wanted to lead—the kind of life she leads in England—one of mere pleasure and self-indulgent ease. She hasn't the faintest conception of duty or of patriotism. She couldn't help her husband in any way, and she wouldn't let him help her. All she cares for is fashion, admiration, and pretty clothes."

"Stuff and nonsense, my dear! She doesn't think one bit more about her clothes than Imogen does. It requires more thought to look like a saint in velvet than to go to the best dressmaker and order a trousseau. I wonder how long it took Imogen to find out that way of doing her hair."

"Rose, I must beg of you——. I love her."

"But I'm saying nothing against her!"

"When I think of what she is suffering now, what you say sounds cruelly irreverent. Jack, I know, feels as I do."

"Yes, he does," said the young man. He got up now and stood, very tall, in the middle of the room looking down at Mary. "I must be off. I'll bring you those books to-morrow afternoon—though I don't see much good in your reading d'Annunzio."

"Why, if you do, Jack," said Mary with some wonder. And the degree of intimate equality in the relations of these young people may be gauged by the fact that he appeared to receive her rejoinder as conclusive.

"Well, he's interesting, of course, and if one wants

to understand modern decadence in an all-round way——"

"I want to understand everything," said Mary, "and please bring your best Italian dictionary with them."

"Before you go, Jack," said Rose, "pray shut the register. It's quite stifling in here."

"Far too hot," said Jack, showing his impartiality of spirit by his seconding of Rose's complaint, for, it was evident, she had much displeased him. "I've often told you, Mary, how bad it was for you. That's why you are so pale."

"I'm so sorry. You have been feeling it much? Leave the door into the hall open."

"And do cast one glance, if only of disapprobation, upon me, Jack," Rose pleaded in mock distress.

"You are a very amusing child, Rose, sometimes," was Pennington's only answer.

"He's evidently very cross with me," said Rose when he was gone. "While you are not—you who have every right to be, angelic Molly."

"I hope you didn't realize, Rose, how you were hurting him."

"I?" Rose opened wide eyes. "How, pray?"

"Don't you know that he is devoted to Imogen Upton?"

"Why, who isn't devoted to her, except wicked me?"

"Devoted in particular—in love with her, I think," said Mary.

Rose's face, after a pause, in which she seemed, though unrepentantly, to acquiesce in a conviction of ineptitude, took on a more acutely discontented look. "Really in love with her?"

"I think so; I hope so."

"How foolish of him!" said Rose.

Mary, at this, rested a gaze so long and so reproachful upon her that the discontent gave way to an affectionate compunction. "The truth is, Mary, that I'm jealous; I'm petty; I'm horrid. I don't like sharing you. I like you to like me most, and not to find other people wonderful."

"If you own that you are naughty, Rose dear, and that you try hard to be naughtier than you really are, I can't be angry with you. But it does hurt me—for your own sake—to see you—really malicious, dear."

"Oh dear! Am I that?"

"Really you are."

"Because I called Imogen Upton a saint in velvet?—and like her mother so much, much more?"

"Yes, because of that—and all the rest. As for jealousy, one doesn't love people more because they are wonderful. One is glad of them and one longs to share them. It's one of my dearest hopes that you may come to care for Imogen as I do—and as Jack does."

Rose listened, her head bent forward, her eyes, ambiguous, in their half-ironic, half-tender meaning, on her friend, but she only said: "*I* shall remain in love with you, Mary." She didn't say again, though she was thinking it, that Jack was very foolish.

CHAPTER II

"DARLING DARLING MOTHER,—

"I know too well what you have been feeling since the cable reached you; and first of all I want to help you to bear it by telling you at once that you could not have reached him in time. You must not reproach yourself for that.

"I am shattered by this long day. Father died early this morning, but I must hold what strength I have, firmly, for you, and tell you all that you will want to hear. He would have wished that; you know how he felt about a selfish yielding to grief.

"He seemed quite well until the beginning of this week—five days ago; but he was never strong. The long struggle that life must always mean to those who face life as he did, wore on him more and more; for others' sakes he often assumed a buoyancy of manner that, I am sure—one feels these things by intuition of those one loves—often hid suffering and intense weariness. It was just a case of the sword wearing out the scabbard. A case of, 'Yes, uphill to the very end.' I know that you did not guess how fragile the scabbard had become, and you must not reproach yourself, darling, for that either. We are hardly masters of the intuitions that warn us of these things. Death teaches us so much, and, beside him, looking at his quiet face, so wonderful in its peace and triumph, I have learned

many lessons. He has seemed to teach me, in his silence, the gentler, deeper sympathy with temperament.—You couldn't help it, darling; I seem to understand that more and more. You weren't at the place, so to speak, where he could help you.—Oh, I want to be so tender with you, my mother, and to help you to wise, strong tenderness towards yourself.

" On Tuesday he worked, as usual, all morning ; he had thrown himself heart and soul, as you know, into our great fight with civic corruption—what a worker he was, what a fighter ! He was so wonderful at lunch, I remember. I had my dear little Mary Colton with me, and he held us both spellbound, talking, with all his enthusiasm and ardour, of politics, art, life, and the living of life. Mary said, as she left me that day, that to know him had been one of the greatest things in her experience. In the afternoon he went to a committee meeting at the Citizens' Union.

" It was bitterly cold, and though I begged him to be selfish for once and take a cab, he wouldn't—you remember his Spartan contempt of costly comforts—and I can see him now, going down the steps, smiling, shaking his head, waving his hand, and saying with that half-sad, half-quizzical smile of his : ' Plenty of people who need bread a good deal more than I need cabs, little daughter.' So, in the icy wind, he walked to the cable-car, with its overheated atmosphere. He got back late, only in time to dress for dinner. Several interesting men came and we had a splendid evening, really wonderful talk, *constructive* talk, vitalizing, inspiring, of the world and the work to be done for it. I noticed that father seemed flushed, but thought it merely the interest of the discussion. He did not come down to breakfast next morning, and when I went to

him I found him very feverish. He confessed then that he had caught a bad chill the day before. I sent for the doctor at once, and for a little while had no anxiety. But the fever became higher and higher, and that night the doctor said that it was pneumonia.

"Dearest, dearest mother, these last days are still too much with me for me to feel able to make you see them clearly. It is all a tragic confusion in my mind. Everything that could be done was done to save him. He had nurses and consultations—all the aids of science and love. I wired for Eddy at once, and dear Jack Pennington was with me too, so helpful with his deep sympathy and friendship. I needed help, mother, for it was like having my heart torn from me to see him go. He was very calm and brave, and once, when I sat beside him, just put out his hand to mine and said: 'Don't grieve overmuch, little daughter; I trust you to turn all your sorrow to noble uses.' He spoke only once of you, dear mother, but then it was to say: 'Tell her—I forgive. Tell her not to reproach herself,' and then—it was the saddest, sweetest summing up, and it will comfort you—'She was like a child.' At the end he simply went—sleeping, unconscious. Oh, mother, mother, forgive these tears, I am weak. . . . He lies now, upstairs, looking so beautiful—like that boyish portrait, you remember, with the uplifted, solemn gaze, only deeper, more peaceful and without the ardour. . . .

"Darling mother, don't bother a bit about me. Eddy and Jack will help me in everything; all our friends are wonderful to us. Day after to-morrow we are to carry him to his rest. After that, when I feel a little stronger, I will write again. Eddy goes to you directly after the funeral.

"If you need me, cable for me at once. I have

many ties and many claims here, but I will leave them all to spend the winter with you, if you need me. For you may not feel that you care to come to us, and perhaps it will be easier for you to bear it over there where you have so many friends and have made your life. So, if I can be of any help, any comfort, don't hesitate, mother dear.

"And—oh, I want to say it so lovingly, my arms around you—don't fear that I have any hardness in my heart towards you. I loved him—with all my soul, as you know; but if, sometimes, seeing his patient pain, I have judged you, perhaps with youth's overseverity, all that is gone now. I only feel our human weakness, our human need, our human sorrow. Remember, darling, that our very faults, our very mistakes, are the things that may help us to grow higher. Don't sink into a useless self-reproach. 'Turn your sorrow to noble uses.' Use the past to light you to the future. Build on the ruins, dear one. You have Eddy and me to live for, and we love you.

"God bless you, my darling mother,

"IMOGEN."

This letter, written in a large, graceful and very legible hand, was being read for the third time by the bereaved wife as she sat in the drawing-room of a small house in Surrey on a cold November evening.

The room was one of the most finished comfort, comfort its main intention, but so thoroughly attained that beauty had resulted as if unconsciously. The tea-table, the fire, the wide windows, their chintz curtains now drawn, were the points around which it had so delightfully arranged itself.

It was a trifle overcrowded, but one wanted nothing

taken away, the graceful confusion, on a background of almost austere order, gave the happiest sense of adaptibility to a variety of human needs and whims. Mrs. Upton had finished her own tea, but the flame still burned in waiting under the silver urn; books and reviews lay in reach of a lazy hand; lamps, candlelight and flowers made a soft radiance; a small *griffon* dozed before the fire. The decoration of the room consisted mainly in French engravings from Watteau and Chardin, one or two fine black lacquer cabinets and a number of jars and vases of Chinese porcelain, some standing on the floor and some on shelves, the neutral-tinted walls a background to their bright, delicate colours.

Mrs. Upton was an appropriate centre to so much ease and beauty.

In deep black though she was, her still girlish figure stretched out in a low chair, her knees crossed, one foot held to the fire, she did not seem to express woe or the poignancy of regret. The delicate appointments of her dress, the freshness of her skin, her eyes, bright and unfatigued, suggested nothing less than a widow plunged in remorseful grief. Her eyes, indeed, were thoughtful, her lips, as she read her daughter's communication, grave; but there was much discrepancy between her aspect and the tone of the letter, and, letting it drop at last, she seemed herself aware of this discrepancy, sighing, glancing about her at the Chinese porcelain, the tea-table, the dozing dog.

She didn't look stricken, nor did she feel so. The first fact only vaguely crossed her mind; the latter stayed and her face became graver, sadder, in contemplating it. She contemplated it for a long time, going over a retrospect in which her dead husband's figure

and her own were seen, steadily, sadly, but without severity for either.

Since the shock of the announcement, conveyed in a long, tender cable over a week ago, she had had no time, as it were, to cast up these accounts with the past. Her mind had known only a confused pain, a confused pity, for herself and for the man whom she once had loved. The death, so long ago, of that young love seemed more with her than her husband's death, which took on the visionary aspect of any tragedy seen from a distance, not lived through. But now, in this long firelit leisure, she reached that final summing of it all. She was grave, she was sad; but she could feel no severity for herself, and, long ago, she had ceased to feel any for poor Everard. They had been greatly mistaken in fancying themselves made for each other, two creatures could hardly have been less so; but Everard had been a good man and she—she was a harmless woman. Both of them had meant well. Of course Everard had always, and for everything, meant a great deal more than she, in the sense of an intentional shaping of courses. She had always owned that, had always given his intentions full credit; only, what he had meant had bored her—she could not find it in herself now to fix on any more self-exonerating term. After the first perplexed and painful years of adjustment to fundamental disappointment, she had at last seen the facts clearly and not at all unkindly, and it seemed to her that, as far as her husband went, she had made the best of them. It was rather odious of her, no doubt, to think it now, but it seemed the truth, and, seen in its light, poor little Imogen's exhortations and consolations were misplaced. Once or twice in reading the letter she had felt an inclination to smile, an inclina-

tion that had swiftly passed into compunction and self-reproach.

Yes, there it was; she could find very little of self-reproach within her in regard to her husband; but in regard to Imogen her conscience was not easy, and as her thoughts passed to her daughter, her face grew still sadder and still graver. She saw Imogen, in the long retrospect—it was always Imogen, Eddy had never counted as a problem—first as a child whom she could take abroad with her for French, German, Italian educational experiences; then as a young girl, very determined to form her own character and sure, with her father to second her assurance, that boarding-school was the proper place to form it. Eddy was also at school, and Mrs. Upton, with the alternative of flight or an unbroken *tête-à-tête* with her husband before her, chose the former. There was no breach, no crash; any such disturbances had taken place long before; she simply slid away, and her prolonged absences seemed symbols only of fundamental and long-recognized divisions. She came home for the children's holidays, built indeed the little house among the Vermont hills, so that she might, as it were, be her husband's hostess there. She hoped, through the ambiguous years, for Imogen's young womanhood, and looked forward to taking her place beside her when the time came for her first steps in the world. But here, again, Imogen's clear-cut choice interfered. Imogen considered girlish frivolities a foolish waste of time; she would take her place in the world when she was fully equipped for the encounter; she was not yet equipped to her liking, and she declared herself resolved on a college course.

Imogen had left college for three years now, but the

routine of Mrs. Upton's life was unchanged. The rut had been made too deep for her to get out of it. It had become impossible to think of re-entering her husband's home as a permanent inmate. Eddy was constantly with her in England in the intervals of his undergraduate life; but how urge upon Imogen more frequent meetings when her absence would leave the father desolate?

The summers had been their only times of reunion, and Mrs. Upton had more and more come to look forward to them with an inward tremor of uncertainty and discomfort. For, under everything, above everything, was the fact, and she felt herself now to be looking it hard in the face, that Imogen had always, obviously, emphatically, been fondest of her father. It had existed from the child's earliest days, this more than fondness, this placid partisanship. In looking back it seemed to her that Imogen had always disapproved of her, had always shown her disapproval, gently, even tenderly, but with a sad firmness. Her defection from her husband's standard was all very well; she cared nothing for Imogen's standard either, in so far as it was an echo, a reflection; only, for her daughter not to care for her, to disapprove of her, to be willing that she should go out of her life, there was the rub; and the fact that she should be considering it over a tea-table in Surrey while Imogen was battling with all the sombre accompaniments of grief in New York, challenged her not to deny some essential defect in her own maternity. She was an honest woman, and after her hour of thought she did not deny it, though she could not see clearly where it lay; but the recognition was but a step to the owning that she must try to right herself. And at this point—she had drawn

a deep breath over it, straightening herself in her chair—her friends came in from their drive and put an end to her solitude.

For the first years of her semi-detached life Mrs. Upton had been as much absorbed in worldly gaieties as a very decorous young grass-widow can be. Her whole existence, until her marriage, which had dropped, or lifted, her to graver levels, had been passed among elaborate social conditions, and wherever she might go she took the protection of a recognized background. She had multitudes of acquaintances, and these surrounding nebulae condensed, here and there, into the fixed stars of friendship. Not that such condensations were swift or frequent. Mrs. Upton was not easily intimate. Her very graces, her very kindnesses, her sympathy and sweetness, were, in a manner, outposts about an inner citadel, and one might for years remain hospitably entertained, yet kept at a distance. But the stars, when once formed, were fixed forever. Of such were the two friends who now came in eager for tea, after their nipping drive: Mrs. Pakenham—English, mother of a large family, wife of a hard-worked M.P. and landowner; energetically interested in hunting, philanthropy, books and people; slender and vigorous, with a delicate, emaciated face, weather-beaten to a pale, crisp red, her eyes as blue as porcelain, her hair still gold, her smile of the kindest; and Mrs. Wake—American, rosy, rather stout, rather shabby and extremely placid of mien. Mrs. Pakenham, after her drive, was beautifully tidy, her shoulders furred, her hair netted. Mrs. Wake was much disarranged and came in, smiling patiently, while she put back the dishevelled locks from her brow. She was childless, a widow, very poor; eking

out her insufficient income by novel-writing : unpopular novels that dealt, usually, with gloomy themes of monotonous and disappointed lives. She was, herself, anything but gloomy.

She gave her friend, now, swift, short glances, while, standing before her, her back to the fire, she put her hair behind her ears. She had known Valerie Upton from childhood, when they had both been the indulged daughters of wealthy homes, and through all the catastrophes and achievements of their lives they had kept in close touch with each other. Mrs. Wake's glances, now, were fond, but slightly quizzical, perhaps slightly critical. They took in her friend, her attitude, her beautifully " done " hair, her fresh, sweet face, so little faded, even her polished finger-nails, and they took in, very unobtrusively, the American letter on her lap.

It was Mrs. Pakenham who spoke of the letter.

" You have heard, then, dear ? "

" Yes, from Imogen."

Both had seen her stunned, undemonstrative pain in the first days of the bereavement ; the cables had supplied all essential information. Her quiet, now, seemed to intimate that the letter contained no harrowing details.

" The poor child is well, I hope ? "

" Yes, I think so ; she doesn't speak much of herself ; she is very brave."

Mrs. Pakenham, a friend of more recent date, had not known Mr. Upton, nor had she ever met Imogen.

" Eddy was with her, of course," said Mrs. Wake.

" Yes, and this young Mr. Pennington, who seems to have become a great friend. May Smith and Julia Halliwell, of course, must have helped her through it all. She says that people are very kind." Mrs.

Upton spoke quietly. She did not offer to show the letter.

"Jack Pennington. Imogen met him when she went last year to Boston. You know old Miss Pennington, his great-aunt, Valerie?"

"Very well. But this Jack I've never met."

"He is, I hear, devoted to Imogen."

"So I infer."

"And the very nicest kind of young man; though over serious."

"I inferred that, too."

"And now," said Mrs. Wake, "Eddy will be here on Saturday; but what of Imogen?"

"Imogen says that she will come over at once, if I want her."

"Far the best plan. She will live with you here, until she marries Mr. Pennington or some other devotee," said Mrs. Pakenham comfortably.

Mrs. Upton looked up at her. "No, I shall go to her, until she marries Mr. Pennington or some other devotee."

There was after this a slight pause, and it was Mrs. Pakenham who broke it with undiminished cheerfulness. "Perhaps, on the whole, that will be best, for the present. Of course it's a pity to have to shut up your home, just as you are so nicely installed for the winter. But you mustn't let her delay, my dear, in getting married. You can't wait over there indefinitely, you know."

"Ah, it's just that that I must do," said Mrs. Upton.

There was, again, silence at this, perhaps over a further sense of fitness, but in it Mrs. Pakenham's eyes met Mrs. Wake's in a long interchange. Mrs. Upton,

in the event of Imogen "delaying," would not stay; that was what, plainly, it intimated.

"Of course," said Mrs. Pakenham, after some moments of this silent acquiescence and silence scepticism, "that will make it very evident why you didn't stay before."

"Not necessarily. Imogen has no one with her now; my preferences as to a home would naturally go down before such an obvious duty."

"So that you will simply take up all the threads, yours and hers?"

"I shall try to."

"You think she'll like that?" Mrs. Pakenham inquired.

"Like what?" Mrs. Upton rather quickly asked.

"That you should take up her threads. Isn't she very self-reliant? Hasn't her life, the odd situation, made her so?"

At this Mrs. Upton, her eyes on the fire, blushed, faintly, yet the deepening of colour was evident, and Mrs. Pakenham, leaning impulsively forward, put her hand on hers, saying: "Dear Valerie! I don't mean that you're responsible!"

"But I am responsible." Mrs. Upton did not look at her friend, though her hand closed gently on hers.

"For nothing with which you can reproach yourself, which you can even regret, then. It's well, altogether well, that a girl should be self-reliant and have her own threads."

"Not well, though," said Mrs. Wake, folding the much-entangled veil she had removed, "that a daughter should get on so perfectly without her mother."

"Really, I don't know about that;" Mrs. Pakenham was eager in liberal theories. "Not well for us poor

mothers perhaps, who find it difficult to believe that we are such background creatures."

"Not well for the daughter," Mrs. Wake rejoined. "In this case I think that Imogen has been more harmed than Valerie."

"Harmed!" Mrs. Pakenham exclaimed, while Valerie Upton's eyes remained fixed on the fire. "How can she have been harmed? From all I hear of her she is the pink of perfection."

"She is a good girl."

"You mean that she's suffered?"

"No, I don't think that she has suffered."

Mrs. Wake was evidently determined to remain enigmatical; but Valerie Upton quietly drew aside her reserves. "That is the trouble, you think; she hasn't."

"That is a symptom of the trouble. She doesn't suffer; she judges. It's very harmful for a young girl to sit in judgment."

"But Valerie has seen her so much!" Mrs. Pakenham cried, a little shocked at the other's ruthlessness. "Three months of every year—almost."

"Three months when they played hostess to each other. It was really Valerie who was the guest in the house when Imogen and her father were there. The relation was never normal. Now that poor Everard is gone, the necessary artificiality can cease. Valerie can try her hand at being a mother, not a guest. It will do both her and Imogen good."

"That's just the conclusion I had come to. That's just how I had been seeing it." The fresh teapot was brought in at this juncture, and, as she spoke, Valerie roused herself to measure in the tea and pour on the boiling water. She showed them, thus, more

fully, the grace, the freshness, the look of latent buoyancy that made her so young, that made her, even now, in her black dress and with her gravity, remind one of a flower submerged, momentarily, in deep water, its colour hardly blurred, its petals delicately crisp, its fragrance only needing air and sunlight to diffuse itself. For all the youthfulness, a quality of indolent magic was about her, a soft haze, as it were, woven of matured experience, of detachment from youth's self-absorption, of the observer's kindly, yet ironic insight. Her figure was supple ; her nut-brown hair, splendidly folded at the back of her head, was hardly touched with white ; her quickly glancing, deliberately pausing eyes were as clear, as pensive, as a child's, with almost a child's candour of surprise in the upturning of their lashes. A brunette duskiness in the rose of lips and cheeks, in the black brows, in the fruitlike softness of outline, was like a veil drawn across and dimming the fairness that paled to a pearly white at throat and temples. Her upper lip was ever so faintly shadowed with a brunette pencilling of down, and three *grains de beauté*, like tiny patches of velvet, seemed applied with a pretty coquetry, one on her lip and two high on her cheek, where they emphasized and lent a touch of the Japanese to her smile. Even her physical aspect carried out the analogy of something vivid and veiled. She was clear as day, yet melting, merged, elusive like the night ; and in her glance, in her voice, was that mingled brightness and shadow.

When she had given them their tea, she left her friends, taking her toasted little dog, languid and yawning, under her arm, and, at a sharp yelp from this petted individual, his paw struck by the opening of the door, they heard her exclaiming in contrition over

him: "Darling lamb! did his wicked mother hurt him!"

Mrs. Pakenham and Mrs. Wake sipped their tea for some time in silence, and it was Mrs. Pakenham who voiced at last the thought uppermost for both of them: "I wonder how Sir Basil will take it."

"Everard's death, you mean, or her going off?"

"Both."

"It's obvious, I think, that if he doesn't follow her at once, it will only be because he thinks that now his chance has come he will make it surer by waiting."

"It's rather odious of me to think about it at all, I suppose," Mrs. Pakenham mused; "but one can't help it, having seen it all, having seen more than either of them have, I'm quite sure, poor, lovely dears."

"No, one certainly can't help it," Mrs. Wake acquiesced, "though I, perhaps, should have been too prudish to own to it just now, with poor Everard hardly in his grave. But that's the comfort of being with a frank, unscrupulous person like you; one gets it all out and need take no responsibility."

Mrs. Pakenham smiled over her friend's self-exposure, and helped her to greater comfort with a still more crude: "It will be perfect, you know, if he does succeed. I suppose there's no doubt that he will."

"I don't know; I really don't know," Mrs. Wake mused.

"One knows well enough that she's tremendously fond of him. It's just that she has taken her stand on, so beautifully, so gracefully."

"Yes, so beautifully and so gracefully, that while one does know that, one can't know more; he least of all. He, I'm pretty sure, knows not a scrap more."

"But, after all, now that she's free, that is enough."

"Yes; except——"

"Really, my dear, I see no exception. He is a delightful creature, as sound, as strong, as true—; and if he isn't very clever, Valerie is far too clever herself to mind that, far too clever not to care for how much more than clever he is."

"Oh, it's not that she doesn't care——"

"What is it, then, you carping, sceptical creature? It's all perfect. An uncongenial, tiresome husband—and she need have no self-reproach about him either—finally out of the way; a reverential adorer at hand; youth still theirs; money; a delightful place;—what more could one ask?"

"Ah," Mrs. Wake sighed slightly, "I don't know. It's not, perhaps, that one would ask more, but less. It's too pretty, too easy, too *à propos*; so much so that it frightens me a little. Valerie has, you see, made a mess of it. She has, you see, spoiled her life, in that aspect of it. To mend it now, so completely, to start fresh at—how old is she?—at forty-six,—it's just a little glib. Somehow one doesn't get off as easily as that. One can't start so happily, at forty-six. Perhaps one is wiser not to try."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear! It's very American that, you know, that picking of holes in excellent material, furbishing up your consciences, running after your motives as if you were ferrets in a rat-hole. If all you have to say against it is that it's too perfect, too happy, why then I keep to my own conviction. She'll be peacefully married and back among us in a year."

Mrs. Wake seemed to acquiesce yet still to have her reserves. There's Imogen, you know. Imogen has to be counted with."

"Counted with! Valerie, I hope, is clever enough to manage that young person. It would be a little too much if the daughter spoiled the end of her life as the husband spoiled the beginning."

"You are a bit hard on Everard, you know, from mere partisanship. Valerie was by no means a misused wife, and his friends may well have thought him a misused husband: Imogen does, I'm sure. She has, perhaps, a right to feel that, as her father's representative, her mother owes her something in the way of atonement."

"It does vex me, my dear, to have you argue like that against your own convictions. It was all his fault; one only has to know her to be sure of it. He made things unbearable for her."

"It was hardly his fault. He couldn't help being unbearable."

"Well, certainly *she* couldn't help it!" cried Mrs. Pakenham, laughing as if this settled it. She rose, putting her hands on the mantelpiece and warming her foot preparatory to her departure; and, summing up her cheerful convictions, she added: "I'm sorry for the poor man, of course; but, after all, he seems to have done very much what he liked with his life. And I can't help being very glad that he didn't succeed in quite spoiling hers. Good luck to Sir Basil, is what I say."

CHAPTER III

MRS. UPTON was in the drawing-room next morning when Sir Basil Thremdon was announced. She had not seen this old friend and neighbour since the news of her bereavement had reached her, and now, rising to meet him, a consciousness of all that had changed for her—a consciousness, perhaps more keen, of all that had changed for him—showed in a deepening of her colour.

Sir Basil was a tall, spare, stalwart man of fifty, the limpid innocence of his blue eyes contrasting with his lean, aquiline countenance. His hair and moustache were bleached by years to a light fawn-colour and his skin tanned to a deep russet by a hardy life ; and these tints of fawn and russet predominated throughout his garments with a pleasing harmony, so that in his rough tweeds and riding-gaiters he seemed as much an outdoor product as any bird or beast. The air of a delightfully civilized rurality was upon him, an air of land-owning, law-dispensing, sporting efficiency, and if, in the fitness of his colouring, he made one think of a fox or a pheasant, in character he suggested nothing so much as one of the deep-rooted oaks of his own park. His very simplicity of consciousness was as fresh, as wholesome, and as genially encompassing, as full summer foliage. One rested in his shade.

He was an inarticulate person and his eyes now, in their almost scared solicitude, spoke more of sympathy and tenderness than his halting tongue. He ended by repeating a good many times that he hoped she wasn't too frightfully pulled down. Mrs. Upton said that she was really feeling very well, though conscious that her sincerity might somewhat bewilder her friend in his conceptions of what the situation required of her, and they sat down, side by side, on a small sofa near the window.

Of late years, the claims on Mrs. Upton's resources from the family across the Atlantic had a good deal clipped her wings, and, though she made a round of spring and of autumn visits, she spent her time for the most part in her little Surrey house, engaged desultorily in gardening, study, and the entertainment of the friend or two whom she had always with her. She had not found it difficult to fold her wings and find contentment in the more nestlike environment. She had never been a woman to seek, only accepting, happily, whatever gifts life brought her; it seemed natural to her that things should be given, and it seemed as natural that they should be taken away. But with the renouncement of more various outlooks, this autumnal quietness, too, had brought its gift, discreet, delicate, a whispered sentence, as it were, that one might only listen to blindfolded, but which, once heard, gave knowledge of a hidden treasure. Sir Basil had been one of the reasons, the greatest reason, for her happiness in the Surrey nest. It was since coming there to live that she had grown to know him so well, with the slow-developing, deep-rooted intimacy of country life. The meadows and parks of Thremdon Priory encompassed on every side the heath where Valerie Upton's

cottage stood among its trees. They were Sir Basil's woods that ran down to her garden walls, and Sir Basil's lanes that, at the back of the cottage, led to the little village, a mile or so away. She had met Sir Basil before coming to live there, once or twice in London, and once or twice for week-ends at country-houses ; but he was not a person whom one came really to know in drawing-room conditions ; indeed, at the country-houses, one hardly saw him except at breakfast and dinner ; he was always hunting, golfing or playing billiards, and in the interludes to these occupations one found him a trifle somnolent. It was after settling quite under his wing, and that she was under it she had discovered only after falling in love with the little white cottage and rushing eagerly into tenancy, that she had found out what a perfect neighbour he was, then had come to feel him as a near friend, then, as those other friends had termed it, to care for him.

Valerie Upton, herself, had never called it by any other name, this feeling about Sir Basil, though it was inevitable, in a woman of her clearness of vision, that she should very soon recognize a more definite quality in Sir Basil's feeling about her. That she had always kept him from naming it more definitely was a feat for which, she well knew it, she could allow herself some credit. Not only had it needed at some moments dexterity, it had needed, at others, self-control. Self-control, however, was habitual to her. She had long since schooled herself into the acceptance of her stupidly maimed life, seeing herself in no pathetic similes at all, but, rather, as a foolish, unformed creature who, partly through blindness, partly through recklessness, had managed badly to cripple herself at the outset of life's

walk, and who must make the best of a hop-skip-and-jump gait for the rest of it. She had felt, when she decided that she had a right to live away from Everard, that she had no right to ask more of fortune than that escape, that freedom. The price of such freedom was a limiting of the possibilities of life, and she had never hesitated to pay. Never to indulge herself in sentimental repinings or in sentimental musings, never to indulge others in sentimental relationships, had been the most obvious sort of payment; and if, in regard to Sir Basil, the payment had sometimes been difficult, the reward had been the sense of unblemished peace, the sense of composure and gaiety. It was enough to know, as a justification of her success, that she made him happy, not unhappy. It was enough to know that she could own freely to herself how much she cared for him, so much that, finding him funny, dear and dull, she was far fonder of his funniness, of his dullness, than of other people's cleverness. He made her feel as if, on that maimed, that rather hot and jaded walk, she had come upon the great oak-tree, and sat down to rest in its peaceful shadow, hearing it rustle happily over her, and knowing that it was secure strength she leaned against, knowing that the happy rustle was for her, because she was there, peaceful and confident.

So it had all been like a gift, a sad, sweet secret that one must not listen to except with blindfold eyes. She had never allowed the gift to become a burden or a peril.

And now, to-day, for the first time, it was as though she could raise the bandage and look at him.

Sitting beside him in her widow's enfranchising blackness she could but see, at last, how deep was that upwelling, inevitable fondness. So deep that, gazing

as if with new and dazzled eyes, she wondered a little giddily over the long self-mastery; so deep that she almost felt it as a strange, unreal tribute to trivial circumstance that, without delay, she should not lean her head against the protecting oak and tell it, at last, that its shelter was all that she asked of life. It was necessary to banish the vision by the firm turning to that other, that dark vision of her dead husband, her grief-stricken child, and, in looking, she knew that while it loomed so near she could not dwell on possibilities of freedom. So she talked with her friend, able to smile, able, once or twice, to use towards him her more intimate tone of affectionate playfulness.

"But you are coming back!—directly!" Sir Basil exclaimed, when she told him that she expected her boy in a few days, and that they would sail for New York together.

"Not directly," she answered. Before very long, she hoped. So many things depended on Imogen.

"But she will live with you, now, over here."

"I don't think that she will want to leave America," said Valerie. "I don't think, even, that I want her to."

"But this is your home now," Sir Basil protested, looking about, as though for evidences of the assertion, at the intimate comforts of the room. "You know that you are more at home here than there."

"Not now. My home, now, is Imogen's."

Sir Basil appeared to reflect, and then to put aside reflection as, after all, inapplicable, as yet, to the situation.

"Well, I must pay America a visit," he said with an unemphatic smile. "I've not been there for twenty years, you know. I'll like seeing it again, and seeing you, in Miss Imogen's home."

Valerie again flushed a little. In some matters Sir Basil was anything but dull, and his throwing, now, of the bridge was most tactfully done. He intended that she should see it solidly spanning the distance between them, and only time was needed, she knew, to give him his right of walking over it, and give her her right—— but that was one of the visions she must not look at. A great many things lay between now and then—confused, anxious, perhaps painful things. The figure of Imogen so filled the immediate future that the place where Sir Basil should take up his thread was blotted into an almost melancholy haze of distance. But it was good to feel the bridge there, to know him so swift and so sure.

"She is very clever, your girl, isn't she? I've always felt it from what you've told me," he said, defining for himself, as she saw, the future when they were to meet.

"Very, I think."

"Very learned and artistic. I'm afraid she'll find me an awful Philistine. You must stand up for me with her."

"I will," Valerie smiled, adding: "But Imogen is very pretty, too, you know."

"Yes, I know. One can see that in the photographs," said Sir Basil. There were several of these standing about the room, and he got up to look at them one after the other. Imogen in evening, in day dress, all showing her erect slenderness, her crown of hair, her large, calm eyes.

"She looks kind, but very cool, you know," he commented. "She would take one in at a great rate; not find much use for an everyday person like me."

"Oh, you won't be an everyday person to Imogen.

And her great point, I think, is her finding a use for everybody."

"Making them useful to her?"

"No; to themselves: to the world in general."

"Improving them, do you mean?"

"Well, yes, I should say that was more it. She likes to give people a lift."

"But—she's so very young. How does she manage it?" Sir Basil queried over the photograph, whose eyes dwelt on him while he spoke.

"Oh, you'll see," Valerie smiled a little at his pertinacity. "I've no doubt that she will improve you."

"Well," said Sir Basil, recognizing her jocund intention, "she's welcome to try, as long as you are there to see that she isn't too hard on me." He dismissed Imogen then from his sight and thoughts, replacing her on the writing-table, and suggesting that Mrs. Upton should take a little walk with him. His horse had been put into the stable, and he could come back for him. Mrs. Upton said that when they came back he must stay to lunch, and that he could ride home afterwards, and this was agreed on; so that in ten minutes time Mrs. Pakenham and Mrs. Wake, from their respective windows, were able to watch their widowed friend walking away across the heather with Sir Basil beside her.

Neither spoke much as they wended their way along the little paths of silvery sand that intersected the common. The day was clear, with a milky, blue-streaked sky; the distant foldings of the hills were of a deep, hyacinthine blue.

From time to time Sir Basil glanced at the face beside him, thoughtful to sadness, its dusky fairness

set in black, but attentive, as always, to the sights and sounds of the well-loved country about her. He liked to watch the quick glancing, the clear gazing of her eyes; everything she looked at became at once more significant to him: the tangle of tenacious roots that thrust through the greensand soil of the lane they entered; the suave grey columns of the beeches above, the blurred mauves and russets of the woods; the swift, awkward flight of a pheasant that crossed their way with a creaking whir of wings; the amethyst stars of Michaelmas-daisies, showing over a white-washed cottage wall; the far blue distance before them, framed in the tracery of the beech boughs. He knew that she loved it all from the way she looked at it, and, almost indignantly, as though against some foolish threat, he felt himself asseverating "It *is* her home; she knows it: the place she loves like that." And when they had made their wide round, down the lane, up a grassy dell, into his park, where he had to show her some trees that must come down; when they had skirted the park along its mossy, fern-grown wall, and under its overhanging branches until, once more, they were on the common and the white of Valerie's cottage glimmered before them, he voiced this protest, saying to her, as he watched her eyes dwell on the dear little place: "You could never bear to leave all this, for good—even if,—even if we let you; you know you couldn't."

Valerie looked round at him, and in his face, against its high background of milk-streaked blue, she saw the embodiment of his words; it was that, not the hyacinthine hills, not the beechwoods, not the heathery common, not even the dear cottage, that she could not bear to leave for good. But since this couldn't be said,

she consented to the symbol of it that he put before her, that " all this," and answered, as he had hoped : " No, indeed ; I couldn't think of leaving it all, for good."

CHAPTER IV

IT was an icy, sunny day, and Imogen Upton and Jack Pennington were walking up and down the gaunt wharf, not caring to take refuge from the cold in the stifling waiting-rooms. The early morning sky was still pink. The waters of the vast harbour were whitened by blocks and sheets of ice. The great city, drawn delicately on the pink in white and pearl, marched its fantastic ranges of "sky-scrapers"—an army of giants—down to the water's edge. And, amid all the rose and gold and white, the ocean-liner, a glittering immensity of helpless strength, was being hauled and butted into her dock, like some harpooned sea-monster, by a swarm of blunt-nosed, agile little tugs.

Jack Pennington thought that he had never seen Imogen looking so "wonderful" as on this morning. The occasion, to him, was brimming over with significance. He had not expected to share it, but Imogen had spoken very sweetly of the help that he would give her if he could be with her in her long, cold waiting; and with touched delight, he found himself in the position of a friend so trusted, so leaned upon, that he could witness all that there must be of pain and fear for her in this meeting of her new life. The old life was with them both. Her black armed her in it, as it were, made her valiant to meet the new. And for

him that old life, the life menaced, though so trivially, by the arriving presence, seemed embodied in the free spaces of the great harbour, the soaring sky of frosty rose, the grotesque splendour of the giant city, the glory, the ugliness of the country he loved, the country that made giantlike, grotesque cities, and that made Imogens.

She was the flower of it all—the flower, and the so much more than flower. He didn't care a fig, so he told himself, about the mere fact of her being beautiful, finished, in her long black furs, her face so white, her hair so gold under her little hat. She wasn't to be picked and placed high above the swarming uglinesses. No, and that was why he cared for her when he had ceased to care for so many pretty girls—her roots were deep; she shared her loveliness; she gave; she opened; she did not shut away. She was the promise for many rather than the guerdon of the few. Jack's democracy was the ripe fruit of an ancestry of high endeavour and high responsibility. The service of impersonal ends was in his blood, and no meaner task had ever been asked of him or of a long line of forebears. He had never in his own person experienced ugliness; it remained a picture, seen, but not felt by him, so that it was not difficult for him to see it with the eyes of faith as glorified and uplifted. It imposed a splendid burden, an ennobling duty, upon those who possessed beauty, and without that grave and happy right to serve, beauty itself would lose all meaning. He often talked about democracy to Imogen. She understood what he felt about it more firmly, more surely, than he himself did; for, where he sometimes suspected himself of theory, she acted. She too rejoiced in the fundamental sameness of the

human family that banded it together in, essentially, the same great adventure—the adventure of the soul. Imogen understood; Imogen rejoiced; Imogen was bound on that adventure not only with him, but, and it was this that gave those wide wings to his feeling for her, with *them*, with all the vast brotherhood of humanity. Now and then, to be sure, faint echoes in her of her father, touches of youthful assurance, youthful grandiloquence, stirred the young man's sense of humour; but it was quickly quelled by an irradiating tenderness that showed her limitations as symptoms of an influence which, in its foolish aspects, he would not have had her too clearly recognize; her beautiful, filial devotion more than compensated for her filial blindness—nay, sanctified it; and her heavenly face had but to turn on him for him to envelop all her little solemnities and importances in a comprehending reverence. Jack thought Imogen's face very heavenly. He was an artist by profession, as we have said, taking himself rather seriously too; but the artistic perception was so strongly coloured by ethical and intellectual preoccupations that the spontaneous satisfaction in beauty for its own sake was rarely his. He saw, certainly, the flowerlike texture of Imogen's skin; the way in which the light azured its whiteness and slid upon its childlike surfaces. He saw the long oval of the face; the firm and gentle lips, drawn with a delicate amplitude; the broad, hazel eyes set under a level sweep of dark eyebrow and outlined, not shadowed, so clear, so wide they were, by the dark lashes. But all the fresh loveliness of line, surface, colour, remained an intellectual appreciation, while what touched, what penetrated, were the analogies she suggested, the lovely soul of which

the lovely face was his assurance. The oval of her face and the charming squaring of her eyes—so candid, so unmysterious—made him think of a Boticelli Madonna; and her long, narrow hands, with their square finger-tips, might have been the hands of a Botticelli angel holding a votive offering of fruit and flowers. His mind seldom rested in her beauty, passing at once through it to what it expressed of purity, serenity and strength. It expressed so much of these that he never had paused at the portals, as it were, to notice its defects. Imogen's nose, as Rose Packer had discovered, was too small; neat rather than beautiful. Her eyes, with the porcelain-like quality of their white, the jewel-like colour of their irises, were over-large; and when she smiled, which she did often, though with more gentleness than gaiety, she showed an over-spacious expanse of large white teeth. For the rest Imogen's figure was that of the typical well-groomed, well-trained American girl, long-limbed, slender, rounded; in her carriage a girlish air of consciousness; the poise of her broad shoulders and slender hips expressing at once hygienic and fashionable ideals that reproved slack gaits and outlines.

As they walked, as they talked, watching the slow advance of the great steamer, as their eyes rested calmly and intelligently on each other, one could see that the girl's relation to this dear friend was untouched by any trace of coquetry, and that his feeling for her, if deep, was perfectly controlled.

"It's over a year, now, since I saw Mamma," Imogen was saying, as they turned again from a long scrutiny of the crowded decks—the distance was as yet too great to allow recognition of individuals. "She didn't come over this summer as usual, poor dear; how

bitterly she must regret that now, though it was hardly her fault. Papa and I fixed on the summer for our trip to the west. It seems a very long time to me."

"And to me," said Jack. "It's only a year since I came really to know you; but how much longer it seems than that."

"It's strange that we should know each other so well, and yet that you have never seen my mother," said Imogen. "Is that she? No, she is not so tall. Poor darling, how tired and sad she must be."

"You are tired and sad too," said Jack.

"Ah, but I am young—youth can bear so much better. And, besides, I don't think that my sadness would ever be like Mamma's. You see, in a way, I have so much more in my life. I should never sit down in my sadness and let it overwhelm me. I should use it, always. It is strange that grief should so often make people selfish. It ought, rather, to open doors for us and give us wider visions."

He was so sure that it had performed these offices for her—looking, as he now looked, at her delicate profile, turned from him while she gazed towards the ship—that he was barely conscious of the little tremor of amusement that went through him for the triteness of her speech. Such triteness was beautiful when it expressed such reality.

"I suppose that you will count for more, now, in your mother's life," he said—that Imogen should, seemingly have counted for so little had been the subject of his indignant broodings. "She will make you her object."

Imogen smiled a little. "Isn't it more likely that I shall make her mine?—one of mine? But you don't know Mamma yet. She is, in a way, very lovely; but

so much of a child. So much younger—it seems funny to say it, but it's true—than I am."

"Littler," Jack amended, "not younger."

But Imogen, while accepting the amendment, demurred to the negation.

"Both, I'm afraid," she sighed.

"Will she like it over here?" Jack mused more than questioned.

"Hardly, since she has always lived as little here as she could manage."

"Perhaps she will want to take you back to England," he surmised, conscious, while he spoke the almost humorous words, of a very firm determination that she shouldn't do so.

Imogen paused in her walk at this, fixing upon him eyes very grave indeed. "Take me back to England? Do you really think that I would consent to that? Surely you know better, Jack?"

"I think I do. Only, you might yield against your will, if she insisted."

"Surely you know me well enough to know that I would never yield against my will, if I knew that my will was right. I might sacrifice a great deal for Mamma: I am prepared to; but never that. Never," Imogen repeated. "There are some things that one must not sacrifice. Her living in England is a whim, my living in my own country is part of my religion."

"I know, of course, dear Imogen. But," Jack was argumentative, "as to sacrifice, say that it was asked of you, by right? Say, for instance, that you married a man who had to take you out of your own country?"

She smiled a little at the stupid surmise. "That hardly applies. Besides, I would never marry a

man who was not one of my own people, who was not a part, as I am a part, of the whole I live for. My life is here, all its meaning is here—you know it—just as yours is."

"I love to know it. I was only teasing you."

He loved to know it, of course. Yet while it answered to all his own theories that the person should be so much less to her than the idea the person lived for, he couldn't but feel at times, with a rueful sense of unworthiness, that this rare capacity in her might apply in most unwelcome fashion to his own case. In Jack the deep wells of feeling and emotion were barred and bolted over by a whole complicated system of reticences; by a careful sense of responsibility, not only towards others, but towards himself; by a disciplined self-control that was a second nature. But, he could see it well enough, if such deep wells there were in Imogen, they needed as yet no bolts and bars. Her eyes could show a quiet acceptance of homage, a placid conviction of power, a tender sympathy; but the depth and trouble of emotion was not in them. He often suspected that he was nearer to her when he talked to her of causes than when he ventured, now and then, to talk of what he felt. There was always the uncomfortable surmise that the man who could offer a more equipped faculty for the adventure of the soul might altogether outdistance him with Imogen. By any emotion, any appeal or passion that he might show, she would remain, so his intuition at moments told him, quite unbiassed, while she weighed, simply, worth against worth and weight—in the sense of strength of soul—against weight. And it was this intuition that made self-control and reticence easier than they might otherwise have been. His theories might

assure him that such integrity of purpose was magnificent; his manly common sense told him that in a wife it was well to be assured of the taint of personal preference; so that, while he knew that he would never need to weigh Imogen's worth against anybody else's, he watched and waited until some unawakened capacity in her should be able happily to respond to the more human aspects of life.

Meanwhile the steamer had softly glided into the dock, and the two young people at last descried upon the crowded decks the tall, familiar figure of Eddy Upton, like Imogen in his fairness, clearness, but with a more masculine jut of nose and chin, sharper lines of brow and cheek and lip. And beside Eddy—Jack hardly needed the controlled quiet of Imogen's "There's Mamma" to identify the figure in black.

She leaned there, high and far, on the deck of the great steamer that loomed above their heads, almost ominous in its gigantic bulk and darkness; she leaned there against the rosy sky, her face intent, searching, bent upon the fluttering, shouting throng beneath; and for Jack, in this first impression of her, before she had yet found Imogen, there was something pathetic in the earnestness of her searching gaze, something that softened the rigours of his disapprobation. But already, too, he fancied that he caught the expected note of the frivolous in the outline of her fur-lined coat, in the grace of her little hat.

Still she sought, her face pale and grave, while, with an imperceptible movement, the steamer glided forward, and now, as Imogen raised her muff in a long, steady wave, her eyes at last found her daughter, and, smiling, smiling eagerly down upon them, she

leaned far over the deck to wave her answer. She put her hand on her son's arm, pointing them out to him, and Eddy, also finding them, smiled too, but with a cooler kindness, raising his hat and giving Jack a recognizing nod. It was then as if he introduced Jack. Jack saw her question, saw him assent, and her smile went from Imogen to him, enveloping him with its mild radiance.

"She is very lovely, your mother, as you say," Jack commented, feeling a little breathless over this silent meeting of forces that he must think of as hostile, and finding nothing better to say.

Imogen, who had continued steadily to wave her muff, welcoming, but for her part unsmiling, answered: "Yes."

"I hope that she won't mind my being here, in the way after a fashion," said Jack.

"She won't mind," said Imogen.

He knew the significance of her voice; displeasure was in its gentleness, a quiet endurance of distress. It struck him then, in a moment, that it was rather out of place for Mrs. Upton to smile so radiantly at such a home-coming. Not that the smile had been a gay one. It had shone out after her search for her daughter's face at the finding of it, and for him it had continued to shine. It was like sunlight on a sad white day of mist, it did not dispel mournfulness, it seemed only to irradiate it. But—to have smiled at all. With Imogen's eyes he saw, suddenly, that tears would have been the more appropriate greeting, and, in looking back at the girl once more, he saw that her own, as if in vicarious atonement, were running down her cheeks. She then felt a doubled suffering, and his heart hardened against the woman who had caused it.

The two travellers had disappeared and the decks were filled with the jostling hurry of final departure. Jack and Imogen moved to take their places by the long gangway that slanted up from the deck.

He said nothing to her of her tears, silent before this subtle grief, perhaps, for all his love and sympathy, a little disconcerted by her demonstration of it, and it was Imogen who spoke, murmuring, as they stood together looking up, " Poor, poor papa."

Yes, that had been the hurt, to see her dead put aside, almost forgotten, in the mother's over-facile smile.

The passengers came trooping down the gangway, with an odd buoyancy of step caused by the steep decline, and Jack, for all his expectancy, had eyes, appreciative and critical, for the procession of his country people. Stout, short men, embodying purely economic functions, with rudimentary features, slightly embossed, as it were, upon pouchlike faces. Thin young men, whose lean countenances had somewhat the steely aspect of machinery, apt for swift, ruthless, utilitarian processes. Bloodless old men, many of whom looked like withered, weary children adorned with whitened hair. The average manhood of America, with its general air of cheap and hasty growth, but varied here and there by a higher type ; an athletic collegian, auspiciously Grecian in length of limb, width of brow, deep placidity of eye ; a massive senatorial head or so, tolerant, humorous, sagacious ; a stalwart Westerner, and the weedier scholar, sensitive, self-conscious, too much of the spiritual and too little of the animal in the meagre body and over-intelligent face.

There was a certain discrepancy, in dress and bodily

well-being, between the feminine and the masculine portion of the procession; many of the heavy matrons, wide-hipped, well-corsetted, benignant and commanding of mien, were ominously suggestive, followed as they were by their fragile husbands, of the female spider and her doomed, inferior, though necessary mate. The young girls of the happier type resembled Imogen Upton in grace, in strength, in calm and in assurance, the less fortunate were sharp, sallow, anxious-eyed; and the children were either confident, rosy and well-mannered, or ill-mannered, pallid, overmature, but also, always, confident.

Highly equipped with every graceful quality of his race, not a touch of the male spider about him, Eddy's head appeared at last, proud, delicate and strong. His mother, carrying a small dog, was on his arm, and, as she emerged before the eyes that watched for her, she was smiling again at something that Eddy had said to her. Then her eyes found them, Jack and Imogen, so near now, sentinels before the old life that her smile, her aspect, her very loveliness seemed to menace; and Jack felt that she caught a new gravity from the stern gentleness of Imogen's gaze, that she adjusted her features to meet it, that, with a little shock, she recognized the traces of weeping on her daughter's face and saw, in his own intentionally hardened look, that she had tuned herself to a wrong pitch and had been all unconsciously jarring.

He couldn't but own that her readjustment, if readjustment it was, was very beautifully done. Tears rose in her eyes too. He saw, as she neared them, that her face was pale and weary; it looked ever so gently, ever so sadly, perhaps almost timidly, at her daughter, and as she came to them she put out

her hand to Imogen, laid hold on her and held her without speaking while they all moved away together.

The tears of quick sympathy had risen to Jack's own eyes and he stood apart while the mother and daughter kissed. After that, and when they had gone on a little before him and Eddy, Mrs. Upton turned to him, and if she readjusted herself she didn't, as it were, retract, for the smile again rested on him while Eddy presented him to her. He saw then that she had suffered, though how or what she had suffered he could not tell; but the pale, weary features, for all their smile, reassured him. She wasn't, at all events, a heartless, a flippant woman.

Eddy and Mrs. Upton's maid remained behind to do battle with the custom-house, and Jack, with Imogen and her mother, got into the capacious cab that was waiting for them.

The streets in this mean quarter were deep in mud. The snow, everywhere, had been trampled into liquid blackness, and the gaunt horses that galloped along the wharves, dragging noisy vans and carts, were splashed all over. It might have been some sordid quarter of an Italian town that they drove through, so oddly foreign was the appearance of the dishevelled houses, their predominant colour a heavy, glaring red. Men in white uniforms were shovelling snow from the pavements. The many negro countenances in the hurrying crowds showed blue tints in the bitter air. Coming suddenly to a wide, mean avenue, where the carriage lurched and swayed on the street-car tracks, they heard, mingled in an inconceivably ugly uproar, the crash and whine of the cable-cars about them and the thunder of the elevated-railway above their heads.

Jack, sensitive to others' impressions, wondered if this tumultuous ugliness made more dreary to Mrs. Upton the dreary circumstances of her home-coming. There was no mitigation of dreariness to be hoped for from Imogen, who was probably absorbed in her own bitter reflections. She gazed steadily out of the window, replying only with quiet monosyllables to her mother's tentative questions, her face keeping its look of endurance. One could infer from it that had she not so controlled herself she must have wept, and sitting before the mother and daughter Jack felt much awkwardness in his position. If their meeting were not to be one with more conventional surface he really ought not to have been invited to share it. Imogen, poor darling, had all his sympathy: she hadn't reckoned with the difficulties; she hadn't reckoned with that hurting smile, with the sharp reawakening of the vicarious sense of wrong; but, all the same, before her look, her silence, he could but feel for her mother and feel, too, a keener discomfort from the fact that his inopportune presence must make Mrs. Upton's discomfort more keen. Mrs. Upton stroked her tiny dog, who, fulfilling all Jack's conceptions of costly frivolity, was wrapped in a well-cut coat, in spite of which he was shivering, from excitement as much as from cold, and her bright, soft gaze went from Jack to Imogen. She didn't acquiesce for long in the silence. Leaning forward to him presently she began to ask him questions about Boston, the dear old great-aunt; to make comments, some reminiscent, some interrogative, upon the scenes they passed through; to lead him so tactfully into talk that he found himself answering and assenting almost as fluently as if Imogen in her corner had not kept

those large, sad eyes fixed on the passing houses. So mercifully did her interest and her ease lift him from discomfort that with a sharp twinge of self-reproach, he more than once asked himself if Imogen found something a little disloyal in his willingness to be helped. One couldn't, all the same, remain at the dreadful depth where her silence plunged them; such depths were too intimate. Mrs. Upton had felt that. It was because she was not intimate that she smiled upon him; it was because she intended to hold them both firmly on the surface that she was so kind. He watched her face with wonder and a little fear, for which he was angry with himself. He noted the three *grains de beauté* and the smile that seemed to break high on her cheek, in a small nick, like that on the cheek of a Japanese doll. She frightened him, made him feel shy, yet made him feel at ease too, as though her own ease were contagious; and his impression of her was softly permeated with the breath of violets. Jack disapproved of perfumes, but he really couldn't tell whether it wasn't Mrs. Upton's gaze only, the sweet oddity of her smile, that, by some trick of association, suggested the faint haze of fragrance.

They reached the long, far sweep of Fifth Avenue, piled high with snow on either side, and they turned presently into a street of brown stone houses, pleasant, peaceful, with an air of happy domesticity.

Mrs. Upton's eyes, while the cab advanced with many jolts among the heaps of snow, fixed themselves on one of these houses, and Jack fancied that he saw in her glance a whole army of alarmed memories forcibly beaten back. Here she had come as a bride,

and from here, not three weeks ago, her dead husband had gone with only his children beside him. Now, if ever, she should feel remorse. Whether she did or not he could not tell, but the eyes with which she greeted her old home were sorrowful.

Imogen, as they alighted, spoke at last, asking him to stay to lunch. He recognized magnanimity in her glance. He had seemed to ignore her hurt; and she forgave him, understanding his helplessness. But though her mother seconded her invitation with, "Do, you must be so tired and hungry, after all these hours," Jack excused himself. Already, he thought, a woman with such a manner as Mrs. Upton's—if manner were indeed the word for such a gliding simplicity—must wonder what in the name of heaven he did there. She was simple, she was gliding; but she was not near.

"May I come in soon and see you?" he said to Imogen while they paused at the foot of the stone steps. And, with at last her own smile, sad but sweet for him, she answered—

"As soon as you will, dear Jack. You know how much of strength and comfort you mean to me."

CHAPTER V

JACK, however, did not go for three or four days, giving them plenty of time, as he told himself, to get used to each other's excesses or defects of grief. And as he waited for Imogen in the long drawing-room that had been the setting of so many of their communings, he wondered what kind of adjustment mother and daughter had reached.

The aspect of the drawing-room was unchanged; changelessness had always been for him its characteristic mark; in essentials, he felt sure, it had not changed since the days of old Mrs. Upton, the present Mrs. Upton's long deceased mother-in-law. Only a touch here and there showed the passage of time. Drawing-room and dining-room were continuous, so that it was but one long room that crossed all the depth of the house, tall windows at the back, heavily draped, echoing dimly the windows of the front that looked out upon the snowy, glittering street. The inner half could be shut away by folding-doors, and the highly polished sideboard, chairs, table, a silver *épergne* towering upon it, glimmered in a dusky element which relegated the room, when not illuminated for use, to a mere ghostly decorativeness. By contrast, the drawing-room was vivid. Its fringed and buttoned furniture—crimson brocade set in a dark carved wood—the dangling lustres of the huge chande-

lier, the elaborate Sèvres vases on the mantelpiece, flanking a bronze clock portentously gloomy, expressed old Mrs. Upton's richly solid ideals; but these permanent uglinesses distressed Jack less than the pompous and complacent taste of the later additions. A pretentious cabinet of late Italian Renaissance work stood in a corner; the dark marble mantelpiece, that looked like a sarcophagus, was incongruously draped with an embroidered Italian cope, and a pseudo-Corregio Madonna, encompassed with a wilderness of gilt frame, smiled a pseudo-smile from the embossed paper of the walls. It was one of Jack's little trials to hear Imogen refer to this trophy with placid faith.

Yet, in spite of its solemn stupidity, the room was not altogether unpleasing; it signified something, were it only an indifference to fashion. It was almost Spartan, for all the carving, the cushioning, the crimson, so little concession did it make to other people's standards or to small, happy, minor uses. Mr. Upton and his daughter had not changed it because they had other things to think of; and they thought of these things not in the drawing-room but in the large library upstairs. There one could find the personal touches, that, but for the cope, the cabinet, the Corregio, lacked below. There the many large photographs from the Italian primitives, the many gracious Donatello and Della Robbia bas-reliefs, expressed something of Imogen too, though Jack always felt that Imogen's aesthetic side expressed what was not very essential in her.

While he waited now, he had paused at last before two portraits. He had often so paused while waiting for Imogen. To-night it was with a new curiosity.

They hung opposite the Corregio and on either side

of the great mirror that rose from the mantelpiece to the cornice. One was of a young man dressed in the fashion of twenty-five years before, dressed with a rather self-conscious negligence. He was pale and earnest, and, though his nose was too small and his eyes too large, he was handsome. A touch of the histrionic was in his attitude, in his dark hair, tossed carelessly, in the unnecessarily weighty and steady look of his dark eyes, even in the slight smile of his firm, full lips, a smile too well adapted, as it were, to the needs of any interlocutor. His arm rested on a book; the long, distinguished hand hanging slackly. Jack turned away with a familiar impatience. In twenty-five years Mr. Upton had changed very little. It was much the same face that he had known; the slack, self-conscious hand, the smile—always so much more for himself than for you—were especially familiar. The hand, the necktie, the smile, so deep, so dark, so empty, were all, Jack was inclined to suspect, that there had ever been of Mr. Upton.

The other portrait, painted with the sleek convention of that earlier epoch, was of a woman in a ball-dress. The portrait was by a French master, and under his brush the sitter had taken on the look of a Feuillet heroine. She was gay, languid, sentimental and extraordinarily pretty. Her hair was dressed in a bygone fashion, drawn smoothly up from the little ears, coiled high and falling across her forehead in a light, straight fringe. Her wonderful white shoulders rose from a wonderfully low white bodice; a bracelet of emeralds was on her arm; a spray of jasmine in her fingers; she was evidently a girl, yet in her apparel was a delicate splendour, in her gaze a candid assurance that marked her as an American girl. And she

expressed charmingly, with charming sincerity, a frivolous convention. This was Miss Cray, a year or so before her marriage with Mr. Upton. The portrait had been painted in Paris, where, orphaned, lovely, but not largely dowered, she had, under the wing of an aunt domiciled in France for many years and bearing one of its oldest names, failed to make the brilliant match that had been hoped for her. This touch of France in girlhood echoed an earlier impress. Imogen had told him that her mother had been educated for some years in a French convent, deposited there by pleasure-loving parents during European wanderings; and Imogen had intimated that her mother's frequent returns to her native land had never quite effaced alien and regrettable points of view.

Before this portrait Jack was accustomed, not to impatience, but to a gaze of ironic comprehension. It had always explained so much to him. But to-night he found himself looking at it with an intentness in which was a touched curiosity, in which, also, and once more he was vexed with himself for feeling it, was an anxiety, almost a fear. Of course it hadn't been like, even then, he was surer than ever of that to-night, with his memory of the pale face smiling down at him and at Imogen from the deck of the great steamer. The painter had seen the mask only; even then there had been more to see. And sure, as he had never been before, of all that there must have been besides to see, he wondered with a new wonder how she had come to marry Mr. Upton.

He glanced back at him. Handsome? yes. Distinguished? yes; there was no trace of shoddiness in his spiritual histrionics. Love, no doubt, had fired his normal chill complacency. Such a butterfly

girl, falling perhaps with bruised wings from the high, hard glare of worldly ambitions—the ambitions of others for her rather than her own ambitions for herself, of that he felt, also quite newly, sure to-night —such a girl had thought Mr. Upton, no doubt, a very noble creature and herself happy and fortunate. And she had been very young.

He was still looking at up Miss Cray when Imogen came in.

He felt sure, from his first glance at her, that nothing had happened, during the interval of his abstention, to deepen her distress. In her falling and folding black she was serene, and the look of untroubled force he knew so well was in her eyes. She had taken the measure of the grown-up butterfly and found it easy of management. He felt with relief that the mother could have threatened none of the things they held dear. And, indeed, for his imagination, her spirit seemed to flutter over them in the solid, solemn room, its very lightness and purposelessness reassuring.

"I am so glad to see you," Imogen said, after she had shaken his hand and they had seated themselves on the sofa that stretched along the wall under the Corregio. "I have been sorry about the other day."

"Oh!" he answered vaguely, not quite sure what the regret was for.

"I ought to have mastered myself; been more able to play the trivial part, as you did: that was such real kindness in you, Jack, dear. I couldn't have pretended gaiety, but I didn't intend to cast a gloom. It only became that, I suppose, when I was—so hurt."

He understood now. "By there not being gloom enough?"

"If you like to put it so. To see her smile like that!"

Jack was sorry for her, yet, at the same time, sorry for the butterfly. "Yes, I know how you must have felt. But it was natural, you know. One smiles involuntarily at a meeting, however sad its background. I believe that *you* would have smiled if she hadn't."

Imogen's clear eyes were upon him while he thus shared with her his sense of mitigations, and she answered without a pause: "Yes, I could have smiled at her. That would have been different."

"You mean—that you had a right to smile?"

"I don't see how she *could*," said Imogen in a low voice, not answering his question, thinking, probably, that it answered itself. And she went on: "I was ready, you know, to help her to bear it all, with my whole strength; but, and it is that that still hurts me so, she doesn't seem to know that she needs help. She doesn't seem to be bearing anything."

Jack was silent, feeling here that they skirted too closely ground upon which, with Imogen, he never ventured. He had brought from his study of the portraits a keener sense of how much Mrs. Upton had to bear no longer.

"But," Imogen continued, oddly echoing his own sense of deeper insights, "I already understand her so much better than I've ever done. I've never come so near. Never seen so clearly how little there is to see. She's still essentially that, you know," and she pointed to the French portrait that, with softly, prettily mournful eyes gazed out at them.

"The butterfly thing," Jack suggested rather than acquiesced.

"The butterfly thing," she accepted.

But Jack went on : " Not only that, though. There is, I'm very sure, more to see. She is so—so sensible."

" Sensible ? " again Imogen accepted. " Well, isn't that portrait sensible ? Doesn't that lovely, luxurious girl see and want all the happy, easy things of life ? It is sensible, of course, clearly to know what they are, and firmly to make for them. That's just what I recognize now in her : that all she wants is to make things easy, to *glisser*."

" Yes, I can believe that," he murmured, a little dazed by her clear decisiveness ; he often felt Imogen to be so much more clear-sighted, so much more clever than himself, when it came to judgment and insight, that he was led at the moment, for very helplessness, to acquiesce. " I suppose that is the essential—the desire of ease."

" And it hurts you that I should be able to see it, to say it, of my mother ? " Her eyes, with no hardness, no reproach, probed him, too. She almost made him feel unworthy of the trust she showed him.

" No," he said, smiling at her, " because I know that it's only to a friend who so understands you, who so cares for all that comes into your life."

" Only to such a friend, indeed," she returned gently.

" Have they been hard, these days ? " he asked her, atoning to himself for the momentary shrinking that she had detected.

" Yes, they have," she answered, " and the more so from my seeing all her efforts to keep them soft : as if it was ease *I* wanted ! But I have faced it all."

" What else has there been to face ? "

She said nothing for some moments, looking at him with a thoughtful openness that, he felt, was almost

marital in its sharing of silence. "She's against everything; everything," she said at last.

"You mean in the way we feared?—that she'll try to change things?"

"She'll not seem to try. She'll seem to accept. But she's against my country; against my life; against me."

"Well, if she accepts, or seems to, that will make it easy for you. There will be nothing to fight, to oppose."

"Don't use her word, Jack. She will make it easy on the surface; but it's that that will be so hard for me to bear: the surface ease over the hidden discord."

"You may resolve the discord. Give her time to grow her roots. How can you expect anything but effort now, in this soil that she can't but associate with mistakes and sorrows?"

"The mistakes and sorrows were in her, not in the soil," said Imogen. "But don't think that though I find it hard, I don't face it; don't think that through it all I haven't my faith. That is just what I am going to do: give her time, and help her to grow with all the strength and love there is in me."

Something naughty, something rebellious and dissatisfied in him was vaguely stirring and muttering; he feared that she might see into him again and give it a name, although he could only have given it the old name of a humorous impatience with her assured rightness. Really she was so over-right that she almost irked and irritated him, dear and beloved as she was. He could only call it over-rightness, for wasn't what she said the simple truth, just as he had always seen it, just as she had always known that, with her, he saw it? She had this queer, light burden suddenly

on her hands, so much more of a burden for being so light; and if her own weight and wisdom became a little too emphatic in dealing with it, how could he reproach her? He didn't reproach her, of course; but he was afraid lest she should see that he found her, well, a little funny.

"What does she do with herself?" he asked, turning hastily from his consciousness of amusement.

Imogen's pearly face, bent on him with such confidence, made him, once more, ashamed of himself.

"She has seen a good many of her friends. We have had quite a stream of fashionable, furbelowed dames trooping up the steps; very few of them people that papa and I cared to keep in touch with—you knew his dislike for the merely pleasure-seeking side of life. And she has seen the dear Delancy Potts too, and was very nice to them, one of the cases of seeming to accept; I saw well enough that they were no more to her than quaint insects she must do her duty by. And she has been very busy with business, closeted every day with Mr. Haliwell. And she takes a walk, with me when I can spare the time; and for the rest of the day she sits in her room dressed in a wonderful tea-gown and reads French memoirs, just as she used always to do."

Jack was smiling, amused now, in no way that needed hiding, by her smooth flow of description. "You must take her down to the girls' club some day," he suggested, "and to see your cripples and all the rest of it. Get her interested, you know; give her something else to think of besides French memoirs."

"Indeed I'm going to try to. Though among my girls I'm not sure that she would be a very wise experiment. Such an *ondulée, parfumée,* polished

person with such fashionable mourning would be, perhaps, a little resented."

"You dress very charmingly, yourself, my dear Imogen."

"Oh, but quite differently. Mamma's is fashion at its very flower of subtle discretion. My clothes, why they are of any time you will," she swept aside her winglike sleeves to show the madonna-like lines of her dress. "A factory girl could wear just the same shape if she wanted to."

"And she doesn't want to, foolish girl? She wants to wear your mother's kind instead?"

"She would dimly recognize it as the unattainable perfection of what she wants; it would pierce."

"Make for envy, you think?"

"Well, I can't see that she would do them any *good*," said Imogen, now altogether in her lighter, happier mood; "but since they may do *her* good, I must, I think, take her there some day."

"And am I to do her some good? Am I to see her to-night?" Jack asked, feeling that though her humour a little jarred on him he could do nothing better than echo it. Imogen now had one of her frankest, prettiest looks.

"Do you know, she is almost too discreet, poor dear," she said. "She wants me to see that she perfectly understands and sympathizes with the American freedom as to friendships between men and women, so that she vacates the drawing-room for my people just as a farmer's wife would do for her daughter's young men. She hasn't asked me even a question about you, Jack!"

Her gaiety so lifted and warmed him that he was prompted to say that Mrs. Upton would have to

very soon, if the answer to a certain question that he wanted to ask Imogen were what he hoped for. But the jocund atmosphere of their talk seemed unfit for such a grave allusion and he repressed the sally.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Jack went away after tea, Imogen remained sitting on the sofa, looking up from time to time at the two portraits while thoughts, quiet and mournful, but not distressing, passed through her mind. An interview with Jack usually left her lapped about with a warm sense of security; she couldn't feel desolate, even with the greatness of her loss heavy upon her, when such devotion as his surrounded her. Her father needed her no more, but Jack needed her. Life, as she felt, would have little meaning for her if it had not brought to her deep needs that she, and she alone, could satisfy. With Jack's devotion and Jack's need to sustain her, it wasn't difficult to bear with a butterfly. She had only to stand serenely in her place and watch it hover. It was, after all, as if she had strung herself to an attitude of strength, only to find that no weight was to come crushing down upon her. The pain was that of feeling her mother so light.

"Poor papa," Imogen murmured more than once, as she gazed up into the steady eyes; "what a fate it was for you, to be hurt all your life by a butterfly."

But he had been far, far too big to let it spoil anything. He turned all pain to spiritual uses. What sorrow there was had always been, most of all, a sorrowing over her.

And then—and here was the balm that had perfumed

all her grief with its sacred aroma—she, Imogen, had been there to fill the emptiness for him. She had always been there, it seemed to her, as, in her quiet, sad retrospect, she looked back now to the very beginnings of childhood. From the first she had felt that her place was by his side, that, together, they stood for something and against somebody. In this very room, so unchanged—she could even remember the same dull thump of the bronze clock, the blazing fire, the crimson curtains drawn on a snowy street—happened the earliest of the episodes that her memory recalled as having so placed her, so defined her attitude, even for her almost babyish apprehension. She had brought down her dolls from the nursery, after tea, and ranged them on the sofa, while her father walked up and down the room, his hands in his pockets, his head thrown back, reciting something to himself, some poem, or stately fragment of antique oratory. He paused now and then as he passed her, and laid his hand upon her head and smiled down at her.

Then the lovely lady of the portrait—just like the portrait in Imogen's recollection—had come in, all in white, with wonderful white shoulders, holding a fan and long white gloves in her hand, and, looking round from her dolls, small Imogen had known in a moment that displeasure was in the air. "You are not dressed!" Those had been her mother's first words as she paused on the threshold; and then, echoing her father's words with amazement and anger: "You are not coming!"

The dialogue that followed, vivid on her mother's side as sparks struck from steel, mild as milk on her father's, had been lost upon her, but through it all she had felt that he must be right, in his gentleness,

and that she, in her vividness, must be wrong. She felt that for herself, even before, turning as if from an unseemly contest, her father said, looking down at her with a smile that had a twinge of tension : " You would rather go and see sick and sorry people who wanted you, than the selfish, the foolish, the overfed, wouldn't you, beautiful little one ? "

She had answered quickly, " Yes, papa," and had kept her eyes on him, not looking at her mother, knowing in her childish soul that in so answering, so looking, she shared some triumph with him.

" I'll say you're suddenly ill then ? " had come her mother's voice, but with a deadened note, as though she knew herself defeated.

" Lie ? No. I must ask you, Valerie, never to lie for me. Say the truth, that I must go to a friend who needs me : the truth won't hurt them."

" But it's unbelievable, your breaking a dinner engagement, at the last hour, for such a reason," the wife had said.

" Unbelievable I've no doubt, to the foolish, the selfish, the overfed. Social conventions and social ideals will always go down for me, Valerie, before realities ; such realities as brotherhood, and the need of a lonely human soul."

While he spoke, he had lifted gently Imogen's long, fair curls, and smoothed her head, his eyes still holding her eyes, and when her mother turned sharply and swept out of the room, the sense of the triumph they shared had made him bend down to her and made her stretch her arms up to him, so that, in their long embrace, he seemed to devote her to those " realities " that the pretty, foolish mother flouted. That had been her initiation, her consecration.

After that, it could not have been many years after, though she had brought to it a far more understanding observation, the next scene that came up for her was a wrangle at lunch one day, over the Delancy Potts —if wrangle it could be called, when one was so light and the other so softly stern. Imogen by this time had been old enough to know what the Potts counted for. They were discoveries of her father's: Mr. Potts, a valuable henchman in that fight for realities to which her father's life was dedicated. Mr. Potts wrote articles in ethical reviews about her father's books—they never seemed to be noticed anywhere else —and about his many projects for political reform and philanthropy. Both he and Mrs. Potts adored her father. It was to him, indeed, they owed all their significance; they were there, as it were, only for the purpose of crystallizing around his magnetic centre. And of these good people her mother, in her crisp, merry voice had said: "I hate 'em"—disposing of the whole question of value, flipping the Potts away into space, as it were, and refusing to lend them any but a humorous attention. Even then little Imogen had comprehendingly shared her father's still indignation at such levity. Hate the excellent Potts, who wrote so beautifully of her father's books, so worshipped all that he was and did, so tenderly cherished her small self? Imogen felt the old reprobation as sharply as ever, though the Potts had become, to her mature insight, rather burdensome—the poor, good, dull, pretentious dears—and would be more so now that their only brilliant function, that of punctually adoring her father in the public press, had been taken from them by his death. One need have no illusion as to the quality of their note; it lacked distinction, serving

only, in its unmodulated vehemence, the drumlike purpose of calling attention to great matters, of reverberating, so one hoped, through lethargic consciousnesses.

But Imogen loved the Potts, so she told herself. To be sure of loving the Potts was a sort of pulse by which one tested one's moral health. She still went religiously at least twice in every winter to their receptions—funny, funny affairs, she had to own it—with a kindly smile and a pleasant sense of benign onlooking at oddity. One met there young girls dressed in the strangest ways, and affecting the manners of budding Margaret Fullers; young writers or musicians or social workers, and funny, frowsy, solemn young men who talked, usually with defective accents, about socialism, and the larger life over ample platefuls of ice-cream. Sweetness and light, as Mrs. Potts told Imogen, was the note she tried for in her reunions, and high endeavour and brotherly love.

Mrs. Potts was a small, stout woman, who held herself very straight indeed, her hands, on festive occasions, folded on a lace handkerchief before her. She had smooth, black hair, parted and coiled behind, and a fat face, pale fawn-colour in tint, encompassing with wastes of cheek and chin such a small group of features—the small straight nose, the small sharp eyes, the small smiling mouth—all placed too high and spanned, held together, as it were, by a *pince-nez* firmly planted, like a bow-shaped ornament pinning a cluster of minute trinkets on a large cushion.

Mr. Delancy Potts was tall, limp, blonde and, from years of only dubious recognition, rather querulous. He had a solemn eye under a fringe of whitened eyebrow, a long nose that his wife often fondly alluded to

as "aristocratic" (they were keen on "blood," the Delancy Potts), and a very retreating chin that appeared sometimes in disastrous silhouette against the light. Draped in the flowing fulness of hair and beard, his face showed a pseudo-dignity.

Imogen saw the Potts with a very candid eye, and her mind drifted from that distant disposal of them to the contrast of the recent meeting, recalling their gestures and postures as they sat, with an uneasy assumption of ease, before her mother, of whom, for so many years, they had disapproved, more, almost, than they disapproved of municipal corruption and "the smart set." As onlooker she had been forced to own that her mother's manner towards them had been quite perfect. She had accepted them as her husband's mourners; had accepted them as Imogen's friends; had indeed so thoroughly accepted them, in whatever capacity they were offered to her, that Imogen felt that a slight enlightenment would be necessary, and that her mother must be made to feel that her own, even her father's acceptance of the Potts', had had always its reservations.

And some acceptances, some atonements, came too late. The Potts had not been the only members of the little circle gathered about her father, who had called forth her mother's wounding levity. She had taken refuge on many other occasions in the half-playful, half-decisive, "I hate 'em," as if to throw up the final barrier of her own perversity before pursuit. Not that she hadn't been decent enough in her actual treatment; it was not only that she would never take the Potts, or any of the other oddities, seriously; it was, most of all, that she would never let them come near enough to try to take her seriously. She held her-

self aloof from her husband's instruments, her husband's friends, her husband's aims—not disdainful, but indifferently gay.

Later on, as Imogen grew into girlhood, her mother lost most of the gaiety and all of the levity. Imogen guessed that storms, more violent than any she was allowed to witness, intervened between young rebellion and the cautious peace, the hostility that no longer laughed and no longer lost its temper, but that, quiet, kind, observant, went its own way, leaving her father to go his. The last memory that came up for her was of what had followed such a storm. It seemed to mark an epoch, to close the chapter of struggle and initiate that of acceptance. What the contest had been she never knew, but she remembered in every detail its sequel: remembered lying in bed in her placid, firelit room, and hearing in her mother's room next hers the sound of violent sobbing.

Imogen had felt, while she listened, a vague, alarmed pity, a pity mingled with condemnation. Her father never lost his self-control, and had taught her that to do so was selfish, so that, as she listened to the undisciplined grief, and thought that it might be well for her to go in to her mother and console her, she thought too of a line of poetry that, tenderly, she would say to her—for Imogen now was fourteen years old, with an excellent taste in poetry—"The gods approve—The depth but not the tumult of the soul." It was a line her father often quoted to her, and she always thought of him when she thought of it.

But, just as she was rising to go on this errand of mercy, her father himself had come in. He sat down in silence by her bed and put out his hand to hers, and then she seemed to understand all from the

very contrast that his silence made. The sobs they listened to were those of a passionate, a punished child, of a child, too, who could use unchildlike weapons, could cut, could pierce ; she must not leave her father to go to it. After a little while the sobs were still, and as her father, without speaking, sat on, stroking her hair and hand, the door softly opened and her mother came in. Imogen could see her, in her long white dressing-gown, with her wide braids falling on either side, all the traces of weeping carefully effaced. She often came in so, to kiss Imogen good-night, gently, and with a slight touch of shyness, as though she knew herself shut away from the inner chamber of the child's heart ; and the moment was their tenderest : for Imogen, understanding, though powerless to respond, never felt so sorry or so fond as then. But to-night, her mother, seeing them there together hand in hand, seeing that they must have listened to her own intemperate grief—their eyes gravely, unitedly judging her told her that—seeing that her husband, as at the very beginning, had found at once his ally, drew back quickly and went away without a word. Whatever the cause of contest between her parents, Imogen knew that their silent confrontation of each other in her presence signified the final severance. After this her mother had acquiesced.

She acquiesced, but she yielded nothing, confessed nothing. Imogen couldn't tell whether she too judged, but she suspected it, and the dim sense of an alien standard placed over against them more and more closely drew her and her father together for mutual sustainment. If, however, her mother judged, she never expressed judgment ; and if she felt the need of sustainment, she never claimed it. It would, indeed, have

been rather fruitless to claim it from the fourth member of the family group. Eddy seemed to belong to the group so little. As far as he went, to be sure, he went always with her and against his father; but then Eddy never went far enough to form any sort of a bulwark. A cheerful, smiling, hard young pagan, Eddy, frankly bored by his father, coolly fond of his mother, avoiding the one, but capable of little effective demonstration for the other. Eddy liked achievement, exactitude, a serene, smiling outlook, and was happily absorbed in his own interests.

So it had all gone on—Imogen traced it, sitting there in her quiet corner, holding balances in fair, firm hands—her mother drifting into a place of mere conventionality in the family life; and, even now, Imogen could not see quite clearly whether it had been she who had judged and abandoned her husband, or he who had judged and put her aside. In either case she could sum it up, her eyes lifted once more to the portrait's steady eyes, with, "Poor, wonderful Papa."

He was gone, the dear, the wonderful one, and she was left single-handed to carry on his work. What this work was loomed largely, though vaguely, for her. The three slender volumes, literary and ethical, were the only permanent testament that her father had given to the world; and dealing, as in the main they did, with ultimate problems, their keynote an illumined democracy that saw in most of the results as yet achieved by his country a base travesty of the true doctrine, the largeness of their grasp was perhaps a trifle loose. Imogen did not so see it. Her appreciation was more of aims than of achievements; but she felt that her father's writings were the body, only, of his message; its spirit lived: lived in herself and

in all those with whom he had come in fruitful contact. To pass on the meaning of that spirit was the task to which she felt herself dedicated. Perfect, unflinching truth; the unfaltering bearing witness to all men of the right as he had conceived it; the seeing of her own personality as but an instrument in the service of good: these were the chief words of the gospel. Life in its reallest sense meant only this dedication: to serve, to love, to be the truth. Her eyes on her father's pictured eyes, Imogen smiled into them, promising him and herself that she would not fail.

CHAPTER VII

IT was in the library next morning that Valerie asked Imogen to join her, and the girl, who had come into the room with her light, soft step, paused to kiss her mother's forehead before going to the opposite seat.

"Deep in ways and means, mamma dear?" she asked her. "Why, you are quite a business woman."

"Quite," Valerie replied. "I have been going over things with Mr. Haliwell, you know." She smiled thoughtfully at Imogen, preoccupied, as the girl could see, by what she had to say.

Imogen was slightly ruffled by the flavour of assurance that she felt in her mother, an assurance as of one who, after gently and vaguely fumbling about for a clue to her own meaning in new conditions, had suddenly found something to which she held very firmly. Imogen was rejoiced for her that she should find a field of real usefulness, were it only that of housekeeping and seeing to weekly bills; but there was certainly a touch of the inappropriate, perhaps of the grotesque, in any assumption on her mother's part of maturity and competence. She therefore smiled back at her with much the same tolerantly interested smile that a parent might bestow on a child's building of a toy castle.

"I'm so glad that you have that to give yourself to, Mamma dear," she said. "You shall most certainly be our business woman and add figures and keep an

eye on investments to your heart's content. I know absolutely nothing of the technical side of money. I've thought of it only as an instrument, a responsibility, a power given me in trust for others."

Valerie, whose warmth of tint and softness of outline seemed dimmed and sharpened, as though by a controlled anxiety, glanced at her daughter, gravely and a little timidly. And as, in silence, she lightly dotted her pen over the paper under her hand, uncertain apparently with what words to approach the subject, it was Imogen, again, who spoke, kindly but with a touch of impatience.

"We mustn't be too long over our talk, dear. I must meet Miss Bocock at twelve."

"Miss Bocock?" Valerie was vague. "Have I met her?"

"Not yet. She is a *protégée* of mine; English; a Newnham woman; a folklorist. I heard of her from some Boston friends; read her books and induced her to come over and lecture to us this winter. We are arranging about the lectures now. I've got up a big class for her—when I say "I," I mean, of course, with the help of all my dear, good friends, who are always so ready to back me up in my undertakings. She is an immensely interesting woman: ugly, dresses tastelessly; but one doesn't think of that when one is listening to her. She has a wonderful mind: strong, disciplined, stimulating. I'm very happy that I've been able to give America to her and her to America."

"She must be very interesting," said Valerie. "I shall like hearing her. We will get through our business as soon as possible so that you may keep your appointment." And now, after this digression, she seemed to

find it easier to plunge. "You knew that your father had left very little money, Imogen."

Imogen, her hands lightly folded in her lap, sat on the other side of the table, all mild attention.

"No, I didn't, Mamma. We never talked about money, he and I."

"No—still—you spent it."

"Papa considered himself only a steward for what he had. He used his money; he did not hoard it, Mamma dear. Indeed I know that his feeling against accumulations of capital, against all private property, unless used for the benefit of all, was very strong."

"Yes," said Valerie, after a slight pause, in which she did not raise her eyes from the paper where her pen now drew a few neat lines. "Yes. But he has left very little for Eddy, very little for you—it was that I was thinking of."

At this Imogen's face from gentle grew very grave.

"Mamma dear, I don't think that you and papa would have agreed about the upbringing of a man. You have the European standpoint; we don't hold with that over here. We believe in equipping the man: giving him power for independence; and we expect him to make his own way. Papa would rather have had Eddy work on the roads for his bread than turn him into a *fainéant*."

Valerie drew her lines into a square before saying: "I, you know, with Mr. Haliwell, am one of your trustees. He tells me that your father gave you a great deal."

"Whatever I asked. He had perfect trust in me. Our aims were the same."

"And how did you spend it? Don't imagine that I'm finding fault."

"Oh, I know that you couldn't well do that," said Imogen with a smile a little bitter. "I spent very little on myself." And she continued, with somewhat the manner of humouring an exacting child: "You see, I helped a great many people; I sent two girls to college; I sent a boy—such a dear, fine boy—for three years' art study in Paris; he is getting on so well. There is my girls' club on the east side, my girls' club in Vermont; there is the Crippled Children's Home—quite numberless charities I'm interested in. It's been one thing after another, money has not lacked, but time has, to answer all the claims upon me. And then," here Imogen smiled again, "I believe in the claims of the self too, when they are disciplined and harmonized into a larger experience. There has been music to keep up; friends to see and to make things nice for; flowers to send to sick friends; concerts to send poor friends to; dinners and lunches to give so that friends may meet—all the thousand and one little things that a large, rich life demands of one."

"Yes, yes," said Valerie, who had nodded at intervals during the list. "I quite see all that. You are a dear, generous child and love to give pleasure—and your father refused you nothing. It's my fault too. My more mercenary mind should have been near to keep watch. Because, as a result, there's very little, dear, very, very little."

"Oh, your being here would not have changed our ideas as to the right way to spend money, Mamma. Don't blame yourself for that. We should have bled *you* too!"

"Oh no, you wouldn't," Valerie said quickly. "I've too much of the instinctive, selfish mother-thing in me to have allowed myself to be bled for

cripples and clubs and artistic boys. I don't care about them a bit compared to you and Eddy. But this is all beside the mark. The question now is—what are we to do? Because that generous, expensive life of yours has come to an end, for the present at all events."

Imogen at this sat silent for some moments, fixing eyes of deep and somewhat confused cogitation upon her mother's face.

"Why—but—I supposed that you *had* minded for Eddy and me, Mamma," she said at last.

"I have very little money, Imogen."

Imogen hesitated, blushing a little, before saying: "Surely you were quite rich when papa married you?"

"Hardly rich; but, yes, quite well off."

"And you spent it all—on yourself?"

Valerie's colour, too, had faintly risen. "Not so much on myself, Imogen, though I wish now that I had been more economical; but I was ignorant of your father's rather reckless expenditure. In the first years of my marriage, before the selfish mother-thing was developed in me, I handed a good deal of my capital over to him, for his work, his various projects; in order to leave him as free for these projects as possible I educated you and Eddy—that too came out of my capital. And the building of the house in Vermont swallowed a good deal of money."

Imogen's blush had deepened. "Of course," she said, "there is no more reckless expenditure possible—since you use the term, mamma—than keeping up two establishments for one family; that, of course, was your own choice. But, putting that aside, you must surely, still, have a good deal left. See how you live; see how you are taken care of, with a maid. I've never had

a maid. Papa, as you know, thought them self-indulgences. See how you dress ; " she cast a glance upon the refinements of her mother's black.

" How I dress, my child ? May I ask what that dress you have on cost you ? "

" I believe only in getting the best. This, for the best, was inexpensive. One hundred dollars."

" Twenty pounds," Valerie translated, as if to impress the sum more fully on her mind. " I know that clothes over here are ruinous. Now mine cost only eight pounds, and was made by a very little woman in London."

Imogen cast another glance, now of some helpless wonder, at the dress.

" Of course you are so clever about such things. I shouldn't wish to spend my thought—and I couldn't spend my time—on clothes. And then the standard of wages is so scandalously low in Europe ; I confess that I would rather not profit by it."

" I am a very economical woman, Imogen," said Valerie with some briskness of utterance. " My cottage in Surrey costs me fifty pounds a year. I keep two maids, my own maid, a cook, a gardener. There's a pony and trap and a stable-boy. I have friends with me constantly and pay a good many visits. Yet my income is only eight hundred pounds a year."

" Eight hundred—four thousand dollars," Imogen translated, a note of sharp alarm in her voice. " That, of course, would not be nearly enough for all of us."

" Not living as you have, certainly, dear."

" But papa ? Surely papa has left something ? He must have made money at his legal practice."

" Never much. His profession was always a by-issue with him. I find that his affairs are a good deal

involved. When all the encumbrances are cleared off, we think, Mr. Haliwell and I, that we may secure an amount that will bring our whole income to about five thousand dollars a year. If we go on living in New York it will require the greatest care to be comfortable on that. We must find a flat somewhere, unless you care to live in England, where we could be very comfortable indeed, without effort, on what we have."

Imogen was keeping a quiet face, but her mother, with a pang of helpless pity and compunction, saw tears near the surface and that, to control them, she fixed herself on the meaning of the last words. "Live out of my own country! Never!"

"No, dear, I didn't think that you would want to; I didn't want it for you either. I only suggested it so that you might see clearly just where we stand, and in case you might prefer it, with our limited means."

Imogen's next words broke out even more vehemently. "I can't leave this house! I *can't*! It is my home." The tears ran down her face.

"My poor darling!" her mother exclaimed. She rose quickly and came round the table to her, putting her arm around her and trying to draw her near. But Imogen, covering her eyes with one hand, held her off. "It's wrong. It's unfair. I should have been told before."

"Imogen, *I* did not know. I was not admitted to your father's confidence. I used to speak to you sometimes, you must remember, about being careful."

"I never thought about it. I thought he made a great deal. I thought you had a great deal of money," Imogen sobbed.

"It *is* my fault, in one sense, I know," her mother

said, still standing beside her, her hand on her shoulder. "If I had been here I could have prevented some of it. But—it has seemed so inevitable." The tears rose in Valerie's eyes also; she looked away to conquer them. "Don't blame me too much, dear. I shall try to do my best now. And then, after all, it's not of such tragic importance, is it? We can be very happy with what we have."

Imogen wept on: "Leave my home!"

"There, there. Don't cry so. We won't leave it. We will manage somehow. We will stay on here, for a time at least—until you marry, Imogen; you will probably marry," and Valerie attempted a softly rallying smile, "before so very long."

But the attempt was an unfortunately timed one. "Oh, Mamma! don't—don't bring your horrible European point of view into *that* too!" cried Imogen.

"What point of view? Indeed, indeed, dear, I didn't mean to hurt you, to be indiscreet."

"The economic, materialistic, worldly point of view, that money problems can be solved by a thing that is sacred, sacred!" Imogen passionately declared, her face still hidden.

Her mother now guessed that the self-abandonment was over and that, with recovered control, she found it difficult to pick up her usual dignity. The insight added to her tenderness. She touched the girl's hair softly, said, in a soothing voice, that she had meant nothing, nothing gross or unfeeling, and, seeing that her nearness was not at the moment welcome, returned to her own place at the other end of the table.

Imogen now dried her eyes. In the consternation that her mother's statements had caused her there had indeed, almost at once, arisen the consoling figure

of Jack Pennington, and she did not know whether she were the more humiliated by her own grief for such a mercenary cause, or by this stilling of it, this swift realization that the cramped life need last for herself no longer than she chose. To feel so keenly the need of escape was to feel herself imprisoned by the new conditions, for never, never for one moment, must the need of escape weigh with her in her decision as to Jack's place in her life. She must accept the burden, not knowing that it would ever be lifted; and with this acceptance the sense of humiliation left her so that she could more clearly see that she had had a right to her dismay. Her crippled life would hurt not only herself but all that she meant to others—her beneficence, her radiance, her loving power; so hurt it that for one dark moment had come just a dart of severity towards her father. The memory of her mother's implied criticism had repulsed it; dear, wonderful, transcendentalist, she must be worthy of him and not allow her thoughts, in their coward panic, to sink to her mother's level. This was the deepest call upon her courage that had ever come to her. Calls to courage were the very breath of the spiritual life. Imogen lifted her heart to the realm of spirit, where strength was to be found, and though her mother, with those implied criticisms, had pierced her, she could now, with her recovered tranquillity of soul, be very patient with her. In a voice slightly muffled and uncertain but very gentle, she said that she thought it best to live on in the dear home. "We must retrench in other places, Mamma. I would rather give up almost anything than this. *He* is here to me." Her tears rose again, but they were no longer tears of bitterness. "It would be like leaving him."

" Yes, dear, yes ; that shall be as you wish," said Valerie, who was deeply considering what these retrenchments should be. She, too, was knowing a qualm of humiliation over self-revelations. She had not expected that it would be really so painful, in such trivial matters, to adjust herself to the most ordinary maternal sacrifices. It only showed her the more plainly how fatal, how almost fatal it was to the right impulses to live away from family ties, so that at their first pressure upon her, in a place that sharply pinched, she found herself rueful. For the first retrenchment, of course, must be the sending back to England of her dear, staunch Felkin, who had taken such care of her for so many years. Her heart was heavy with the thought. She was very fond of Felkin, and to part with her would be, in a chill, almost an ominous way, like parting with the last link that bound her to " over there." Besides, Valerie was a luxurious woman. Unpleasant visions went through her mind of mud to be brushed off and braid to be put on the bottoms of skirts ; stockings to darn—she was sure that it was loathsome to darn stockings ; buttons to keep in their places ; all the thousand and one little rudiments of life, to which one had never had to give a thought, looming, suddenly, in the foreground of one's consciousness. And how very tiresome to do one's own hair. Well, it couldn't be helped. She accepted the accompanying humiliation, finding no refuge in Imogen's spiritual consolations.

" Eddy leaves Harvard this summer and goes into Mr. Haliwell's office. He will live with us here then. And we can be very economical about food and clothes ; I can help little dressmakers with yours, you know," she said, smiling at her child.

"Everything, Mamma, everything must be done, rather than leave this house."

"We mustn't let the girls' clubs suffer, either," Valerie attempted further to lighten the other's gloomy resolution. "That's one of the first claims we must fit in."

"I must balance all claims with justice. I have many other calls upon me, dear, and it will need earnest thought to know which to eliminate."

"Well, the ones you care about most are the ones we'll try to fit in."

"My caring is not the standard, Mamma. The ones that need me most are the ones I shall fit in."

Imogen rose, drawing a long, sighing breath. Under her new and heavy burden, her mother, in these suggestions for the disposal of her life, was glib, assured. But the necessity for tenderness and forbearance was strongly with her. She went round the table to Valerie, pressed her head to her breast and kissed her forehead, saying: "Forgive me if I have seemed hard, darling."

"No, dear, no; I quite understood all you felt," Valerie said, returning the kiss. But, after Imogen had left her, she sat for a long time, very still, her hand only moving, as she traced squares and circles on her paper.

CHAPTER VIII

JACK thought that he had never seen Imogen looking graver than on that night when he came again. Her face seemed calm only because she so compressed and controlled all sorts of agitating things. Her mother was with her in the lamp-lit library, and he guessed already that, in any case, Imogen, before her mother, would rarely show gaiety and playfulness. Gaiety and playfulness would seem to condone the fact that her mother found so little need of help in " bearing " the burden of her regret and of her self-reproach. But, allowing for this, Imogen's gravity was more than negative. It confronted him like a solemn finger laid on firmly patient lips ; he felt it dwell upon him like solemn eyes while he shook hands with Mrs. Upton, whom he had not seen since the morning of her arrival.

Mrs. Upton, too, was grave, after a fashion ; but her whole demeanour might be decidedly irritating to a consciousness so burdened with a sense of change as Imogen's evidently was. Even before that finger, those eyes, into which he had symbolized Imogen's manner, Mrs. Upton's gravity could break into a smile quite undisturbed apparently by any sense of its inappropriateness. She sat near the lamp crocheting, soft, white wool sliding through her fingers and wave after wave of cloudy substance lengthening a tiny

baby's jacket, so very small a jacket that Jack surmised it to be a gift for an expectant mother. He further surmised that Mrs. Upton would be very nice to expectant mothers; that they would like to have her "around."

Mrs. Upton would not curb her smile on account of Imogen's manner, nor would she recognize it to the extent of tacitly excluding her from the conversation. She seemed, indeed, to pass him on, in all she said, to Imogen, and Jack, once more, found his situation between them a little difficult; for if Mrs. Upton passed him on, Imogen was in no hurry to receive him. He had, once or twice, the sensation of being stranded, and it was always Mrs. Upton who felt his need and who pushed him off into the ease of fresh questions.

He was going back to Boston the next day and asked Imogen if he could take any message to Mary Colton.

"Thank you, Jack," said Imogen; "but I write to Mary, always, twice a week. She depends on my letters."

"When is she coming to you again?"

"I am afraid she is not to come at all, now."

"You're not going away?" the young man asked sharply, for her voice of sad acceptance implied something quite as sorrowful.

"Oh no," Imogen answered; "but Mamma does not feel that I can have my friends here now."

Jack, stranded indeed, looked his discomfort and, glancing at Mrs. Upton, he saw it echoed, though with a veiled echo. She laid down her work; she looked at her daughter as though to probe the significance of her speech, and, not finding her clue, she sat rather helplessly silent.

"Well," said Jack with attempted lightness, "I hope that I'm not exiled too."

"Oh, Jack, how can you," said Imogen. "It is only that we have discovered that we are very, very poor, and one's hospitable impulses are shackled. Mamma has been so brave about it, and I don't want to put any burdens upon her, especially no burdens that would be so uncongenial to her as dear, funny Mary. Mamma could hardly care for that typical New England thing. Don't mind Jack, Mamma; he is such a near friend that I can talk quite frankly before him."

For Mrs. Upton was now gathering up her innocent work, preparatory, it was evident, to departure.

"You are not displeased, dear!" Imogen protested as she rose, not angry, not injured—Jack was trying to make it out—but full of a soft withdrawal. "Please don't go. I so want you and Jack to see something of each other."

"I will come back presently," said Mrs. Upton. And so she left them. Jack's thin face had flushed.

"She means that *she* won't talk quite frankly before you, you see," said Imogen. "Don't mind, dear Jack, she is full of these foolish little conventionalities; she cares so tremendously about the forms of things. I simply pay no attention; that's the best way. But it's quite true, Jack; I don't know that I can afford to have my friends come and stay with me any more. Apparently Mamma and Papa—in their so different ways—have been very extravagant; and I, too, Jack, have been extravagant. I never knew that I mustn't be. The money was given to me as I asked for it—and there were so many, so many claims. Oh! I can't say that I'm sorry that it is gone as it went. But now that we are very poor, I want it to be my pleasures,

rather than hers, that are cut off ; she depends so upon her pleasures, her comforts. She depends more upon her maid, for instance, than I do even upon my friends. To go without Mary this winter will be hard, of course ; but our love is founded on deeper things than seeing and speaking : and Mamma would feel it tragic, I'm quite sure, to have to do up her own hair."

" Good heaven, my dear Imogen ! if you are so poor, surely she can learn to do up her own hair ! " Jack burst out, the more vehemently from the fact that Mrs. Upton's unprotesting, unexplanatory departure had, to his own consciousness, involved him with Imogen in a companionship of crudity and inappropriateness. She would not interfere with their frankness, but she would not be frank with them. She didn't care a penny for what his impression of her might be. Imogen might fit as many responsibilities upon her shoulders as she liked and, with her long training in a school of reticences and composures, she would remain placid and indifferent. So Jack worked it out, and he resented, for Imogen and for himself, such tact and such evasion. He wished that they had been more crude more inappropriate. Thank heaven for crudeness if morality, as opposed to manners, made one crude. He entrenched himself in that morality now, open-eyed to its seeming priggishness, to say—

" And it's a bigger question than that of her pleasures and yours, Imogen. It's a question of right and wrong. Mary needs you. Your mother ought not to keep a maid if other people's needs are to be sacrificed to her luxuries."

Imogen was looking thoughtfully into the fire, her calmness now not the result of mastery ; her own serene assurance was with her.

" I've thought of all that, Jack ; I've weighed it ; and though I feel it, as you do, a question of right and wrong, I don't feel that I can force it upon her. It would be like taking its favourite doll from a child. She is trying, I do believe, to atone ; she is trying to do her duty by making, as it were, *une acte de présence* ; one wants to be very gentle with her ; one doesn't want to make things more difficult than they must seem already. Poor, dear little Mamma. But as for me, Jack, it's more than pleasures that I have to give up. I have to say no to some of those claims that I've given my life to. It's like cutting into my heart to do it."

She turned away her head to hide the quiet tears that rose involuntarily, and by the sight of her noble distress, by the realization too of such magnanimity towards the trivial little mother, Jack's inner emotion was pushed, suddenly, past all the bolts and barriers. Turning a little pale, he leaned forward and took her hand, stammering as he said : " Dear, dearest Imogen, you know—you know what I want to ask, whenever you will let me speak ; you know the right I want to claim."

It had come, the moment of avowal ; but they had glided so quietly upon it that he felt himself unprepared for his own declaration. It was Imogen's tranquil acceptance, rather than his own eagerness, that made the situation seem real.

" I know, dear Jack, of course I know," she said. " It has been a deep, a peaceful joy for a long time to feel that I was first with you. Let it rest there, for the present, dear Jack."

" I've not made anything less joyful or less peaceful for you by speaking ?"

"No, no, dear. It's only that I couldn't think of it for some time yet."

"You promise me that, meanwhile, you will think of me as your friend just as happily as before?"

"Just as happily, dear Jack. I could never, as long as you are you and I am I, think of you in any other way." And she went on, with her tranquil radiance of aspect: "I have always meant, you know, to make something of my life before I chose what to do with it."

Jack, too, thought Imogen's life a flower so precious that it must be placed where it could best bloom; but, feeling in her dispassionateness a hurt to his hope that it would best bloom in his care, he asked: "Mightn't the making something of it come after the choice, dear?"

Very clear as to what was her own meaning, Imogen shook her lovely, unconfused head. "No; only the real need could rightly choose, and one can only know the real need when one has made the real self."

These were Jack's own views, but, hearing them from her lips, they chilled.

"It seems to me that your self, already, is very real," he said, smiling a little ruefully. And Imogen now, though firm, was very wonderful; for leaning to him she put for a moment her hand on his and said, smiling back with the tranquil tenderness: "Not yet, not quite yet, Jack; but we trust each other's truth, and we can't but trust—I do, dear Jack, with all my heart—that it can never part us."

He kissed her hand at that, and promised to trust and to be patient, and Imogen, presently, lifted matters back into their accustomed place, saying that he must help her with her project for building a country home

for her crippled children. She had laid the papers before him, and they were deep in ways and means when a sharp, imperious scratching at the door interrupted them.

Imogen's face, as she raised it, showed a touch of weary impatience. "Mamma's dog," she said. "He can't find her. Let him scratch. He will go away when no one answers."

"Oh, let's satisfy him that she isn't here," said Jack, who was full of a mild, though alien consideration for animals.

"Can you feel any fondness for such wisps of sentimentality and greediness as that?" Imogen asked, as the tiny *griffon* darted into the room and ran about, sniffing with interrogative anxiety.

"Not fondness, perhaps, but amused liking."

"There, now you see he will whine and bark to be let out again. He is as arrogant and as troublesome as a spoilt child."

"I'll hold him until she comes," said Jack. "I say, he is a nice little beast—full of gratitude; see him lick my cheek." He had picked up the dog and come back to her.

"I really disapprove of such absurd creatures," said Imogen. "Their very existence seems a wrong to themselves and to the world."

"Well, I don't know." Theoretically Jack agreed with her as to the extravagant folly of such morsels of frivolity, but, holding the *griffon*, meeting its merry, yet melancholy eyes, evading its affectionate, caressing leaps towards his cheek, he couldn't echo her reasonable rigour. "They take something the place of flowers in life, I suppose."

"What takes the place of flowers?" Mrs. Upton

asked. She had come in while they spoke, and her tone of kind, mild inquiry slightly soothed Jack's ruffled sensibilities.

"This," said he, holding out her possession to her.

"Oh, Tison. How good of you to take care of him. He was looking for me, poor pet."

"Imogen was wondering as to the uses of such creatures and I placed them in the decorative category," Jack went on, determined to hold his own firmly against any unjustifiable claims of either Tison or his mistress, He accused himself of a tendency to soften under her glance when it was so kindly and so consciously bent upon him. Her indifference cut him and made him hostile, and both softness and hostility were, as he told himself, symptoms of a silly sensitiveness. The proper attitude was one of firmness and humour.

"I am afraid that you don't care for dogs," Mrs. Upton said. She had gone back to her seat, taking up her work and passing her hand over Tison's silky back as he established himself in her lap.

"Oh yes, I do; I care for flowers too," said Jack, folding his arms and leaning back against the table, while Imogen sat before her papers, observant of the little encounter.

"But they are not at all in the same category. And surely," Mrs. Upton continued, smiling up at him, "one doesn't justify one's fondness for a creature by its uses."

"I think one really must, you know," our ethical young man objected, feeling that he must grasp his latent severity when Mrs. Upton's vague sweetness of regard was affecting him somewhat as her dog's caressing little tongue had done. "If a fondness is one we have a right to, we can justify it; and it can only be

justified by its utility, actual or potential, to the world we are a part of."

Mrs. Upton continued to smile as though she did not suspect him of wishing to be taken seriously. "One doesn't reason like that before one allows oneself to become fond."

"There are lots of things we must reason about to get rid of," Jack smiled back.

"That sounds very chilly and uncomfortable. Besides, something loving, pretty, responsive—something that one can make very happy—is useful to one."

"But only that," Imogen now intervened, coming to her friend's assistance with decision. "It serves only one's own pleasure—that is its only use. And when I think, Mamma darling, of all the cold, hungry, unhappy children in this great town to-night, of all the suffering children, such as those that Jack and I have been trying to help, I can't but feel that your petted little dog there robs some one."

Mrs. Upton, looking down at her dog, now asleep in a profound content, continued to stroke him in silence.

Jack felt that Imogen's tone was perhaps a little too rigorous for the occasion. "Not that we want you to turn Tison out into the streets," he said jocosely.

"No; you mustn't ask that of me," Valerie answered, her tone less light than before. "It seems to me that there is a place for dear unreasonable things in the world. All that Tison is made for is to be petted. A child is a different problem."

"And a problem that it needs all our time, all our strength, all our love and faith to deal with," Imogen returned with gentle sadness. "You *are* robbing some one, Mamma dear."

"Apparently we are a naughty couple, you and I,

Tison," Mrs. Upton said. "But I am too old and you too permanently young to mend."

She had begun to crochet again; but, though she resumed all her lightness, her mildness, Jack fancied that she was a little angry.

When he was gone, Mrs. Upton said, looking up at her daughter: "Of course you must have Mary Colton to stay with you, Imogen."

Imogen had gone to the fire and was gazing into it. She was full of a deep contentment. By her attitude towards Jack this evening, her reception of his avowal, she had completely vindicated herself. Peace of mind was impossible to Imogen unless her conscience were clear of any cloud, and now the morning's humiliating fear was more than atoned for. She was not the woman to clutch at safety when pain threatened; she had spoken to him exactly as she would have spoken yesterday, before knowing that she was poor. And under this satisfaction was the serene gladness of knowing him so surely hers.

Her face, as she turned it towards her mother, adjusted itself to a task of loving severity. "I cannot think of having her, Mamma."

"Why not? She will add almost nothing to our expenses. I never for a moment dreamed of your not having her. I don't know why you thought it my wish."

Imogen looked steadily at her. "Not your wish, Mamma? After what you told me this morning?"

"I only said that we must be economical and careful."

"To have one's friends to stay with one is a luxury, is not to be economical and careful. I don't forget what you said of my expensive mode of life, of my clothes: a reproof that I am very sure was well

deserved. I should not have been so thoughtless. But it is not fair, Mamma; really it is not fair—you must see that—to reproach me and my father—by implication, even if not openly—with our reckless charities, and then refuse to take the responsibility for my awakening."

Imogen, though she spoke with emotion, spoke without haste. Her mother sat with downcast eyes, working on, and a deep colour rose to her cheeks.

"I do want things to be open and honest between us, Mamma," Imogen went on. "We are so very different in temperament, in outlook, in conviction, that to be happy together we must be very true with each other. I want you always to say just what you mean, so that I may understand what you really want of me and may clearly see whether I can do it or not. I have such a horror of any ambiguity in human relations. I believe so in the most perfect truth."

Valerie was still silent for some moments after this. When she did speak it was only of the practical matter that they had begun with. "I do want you to have your friends with you, Imogen. It will not be a luxury. I will see that we can afford it."

"I shall be very, very glad of that, dear. I wish I had understood before. You see, just now, before Jack, I felt that you were hurt, displeased, by my inference from our talk this morning. You made me feel by your whole manner that you found me graceless, tasteless, to blame in some way—perhaps for speaking about it to Jack. Jack is very near me, Mamma."

"But not near me."

"Ah, you made me feel that, too, and that you reproached me with having, as it were, forced an intimacy upon you."

Valerie was drawing her dark brows together, as though her clue had indeed escaped her. Imogen's mind slipped from link to link of the trivial, yet significant matter with an ease and certainty of purpose that was like the movement of her own sleek needle, drawing loop after loop of wool into a pattern; but what Imogen's pattern was she could hardly tell. She abandoned the wish to make her own interpretation clear, looking up presently with a faint smile. "I'm sorry, dear. I meant nothing of all that, I assure you. And as to 'Jack,' it was only that I did not care to justify myself before him—at your expense it might seem."

"Oh, Mamma, dear!" Imogen laughed out. "You thought me so wrong, then, that you were afraid of harming his devotion to me by letting him see how very wrong it was! Jack's devotion is very clear-sighted. It's a devotion that, if it saw wrongs in me, would only ask to show them to me, too, and to stand shoulder to shoulder with me in fighting them."

"He must be a remarkable young man," said Valerie, quite without irony.

"He is like most *real* people in this country, Mamma," said Imogen, on a graver note. "We have, I think, evolved a new standard of devotion. We don't want to have dexterous mammas throwing powder in the eyes of the men who care for us and sacrificing their very conception of right on the altar of false maternal duty. The duty we owe to any one *is* our truth. There is no higher duty than that. Had I been as ungenerous, as unkind, as you, I'm afraid, imagined me this evening, it would still have been your duty, to him, to me, to bring the truth fearlessly to the light. I should have been amused, had I not been so hurt, to see you,

as you fancied, shielding me! Please never forget, dear, in the future, that Jack and I are truth-lovers."

Looking slightly bewildered under this cascade of smooth fluency, Valerie, still with her deepened colour, here murmured that she, too, cared for the truth, but the current bore her on. "I don't think you *see* it, Mamma, else you could hardly have hurt me so."

"Did I hurt you so?"

"Why, Mamma, don't you imagine that I am made of flesh and blood? It was dreadful to me, your leaving me like that, with the situation on my hands."

Valerie, after another little silence, now repeated, "I'm sorry, dear," and, as if accepting contrition, Imogen stooped and kissed her tenderly.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Mary's visit took place about six weeks later, Jack Pennington was in New York again and Mrs. Wake, returned from Europe, had been for some time established in her little flat not very far away in Washington Square.

The retrenchments were already effected in the Upton household and Mary found her friend putting her shoulder to the wheel with melancholy courage. The keeping up of old beneficences meant redoubled labour and, as she said to Mary, with the smile that Mary found so wonderful: "It seems to me now that whenever I put my hand out to help, it gets caught and pinched." Mary, helper and admirer, said to Jack that the way in which Imogen had gathered up her threads, allowing hardly one to snap, was too beautiful. These young people, like the minor characters in a play, met often in the drawing-room while Imogen was busy upstairs or gone out upon some important errand. Just now, Miss Bocock's lectures having been set going, the organization of a performance to be given for the cripple children's country home was engaging all her time. Tableaux from the Greek drama had been fixed on, the Potts were full of eagerness, and Jack had been pressed into service as stage manager. The distribution of rôles, the grouping of

the pictures, the dressing and the scenery were in his hands.

"It's really extraordinary, the way in which, amidst her grief, she goes through all this business, all this organizing, getting people together for her committee, securing the theatre," said Mary, "Isn't it too bad that she can't be in the tableaux herself? She would have been the loveliest of all."

Jack, rather weary, after an encounter with a band of dissatisfied performers in the library, said: "One could have put one's heart into making an Antigone of her, that's what I wanted—the filial Antigone, leading Œdipus through the olive groves of Colonus. It's bitter, instead of that, to have to rig Mrs. Scott out as Cassandra; will you believe it, Mary, she insists on being Cassandra—with that figure, that nose! And she has fixed her heart on the scene where Cassandra stands in the car outside the house of Agamemnon. She fancies that she is a tragic, ominous type."

"She has nice arms you know," said the kindly Mary.

"Don't I know!" said Jack. "Well, it's through them that I shall circumvent her. Her arms shall be fully displayed and her face turned away from the audience."

"Jack dear, you mustn't be spiteful." Mary shook her head a little at him. "I've thought that I felt just a touch of, of—well—flippancy in you once or twice lately. You mustn't deceive poor Mrs. Scott. It's that that is so wonderful about Imogen. I really believe that she could make her give up the part, if she set herself to it; she might even tell her that her nose was too snub for it—and she would not wound her. It's extraordinary her

power over people. They feel, I think, the tenderness, the disinterestedness, that lies beneath the truth."

"I suppose there's no hope of persuading her to be Antigone?"

"Don't suggest it again, Jack. The idea hurt her so."

"I won't. I understand. When is Rose coming?"

"In a day or two. She is to spend the rest of the winter with the Langleys. What do you think of for her?"

"Helen appearing between the soldiers, before Necuba and Menelaus. I only wish that Imogen had more influence over Rose. Your theory about her power doesn't hold good there."

"Ah, even there, I don't give up hope. Rose doesn't really know Imogen. And then Rose is a child in many ways, a dear, but a spoiled child."

"What do you think of Mrs. Upton, now that you see something of her?" Jack asked abruptly.

"She is very sweet and kind, Jack. She is working so hard for all of us. She is going to make my robe. She is addressing envelopes now—and you know how dull that is. I am sure I used to misjudge her. But she is very queer, Jack."

"Queer? In what way queer?" Jack asked, placing himself on the sofa, his legs stretched out before him, his hands in his pockets.

"I hardly know how to express it. She is so light, yet so deep, and I can't make out why or where she is deep, it's there that the queerness comes in. I feel it in her smile the way she looks at you; I believe I feel it more than she does. She doesn't know she's deep."

"Not really found herself herself yet, you think?"

Jack questioned; the phrase was one often in use between these young people.

Mary mused. "Somehow that doesn't apply to her. I don't believe she'll ever look for herself."

"You think it's you she finds," Jack suggested, voicing a dim suspicion that had come to him once or twice of late.

"What do you mean, exactly, Jack?"

"I'm sure I don't know." He laughed a little. "So you like her?" he questioned.

"I think I do, against my judgment, against my will, as it were. But that doesn't imply that one approves of her."

"Why not?"

"Why Jack, you know the way *you* felt about it the day you and I and Rose talked it over."

"But we hadn't seen her then. What I want to know is just what *you* feel, now that you have seen her."

Mary had another conscientious pause. "How can one approve of her while Imogen is there?" she said at last.

"You mean that Imogen makes one remember everything?"

"Yes. And Imogen is everything she isn't."

"So that, by contrast, she loses?"

"Yes, and do you know, Jack"—Mary lowered her voice while she glanced up at Mrs. Upton's portrait—"I can hardly believe that she has suffered, really suffered, about him, at all. She is so unlike a widow."

"I suppose she felt herself a widow long ago."

"She had no right to feel it, Jack. His death should cast a deeper shadow on her."

As Jack, shamefully, could see Mr. Upton as shadow

removed, he only said, after a slight pause: "Perhaps that's another of the things she doesn't obviously show; suffering, I mean."

"I'm afraid that she's incapable of feeling any conviction of sin," said Mary, "and that wise, old-fashioned phrase expresses just what I mean as to a lack in her. On the other hand, in a warm-hearted pagan sort of way, she is, I'm quite sure, one of the kindest of people. Her maid, when she went back to England the other day, cried dreadfully at leaving her, and Mrs. Upton cried too. I happened to find them together just before Felkin went. Now I had imagined, in my narrow way, that a spoilt beauty was always a tyrant to her maid."

"Oh, so her maid's gone. How does she do her hair, then?"

"Do her hair, Jack? What a funny question. As we all do, of course, with her wits and her hands, I suppose. Any one with common sense can do their hair." Jack kept silence, reflecting on the picture that Imogen had drawn for him—the child bereft of its toy. Had it given it up willingly, or had it been forced to relinquish it by the pressure of circumstance? Remembering his own stringent words he felt a qualm of compunction. Had he armed Imogen for this ruthlessness?

The lustrous folds of Mrs. Upton's hair at lunch reassured him as to her fitness to do without Felkin in that particular, but his mind still dwelt on the picture of the crying child and he asked Imogen, when he was next alone with her, how the departure of Felkin had been effected.

"You couldn't manage to let her keep the toy, then?"

"The toy?" Imogen was blank.

He enlightened her. "Her maid, you know, who had to do her hair."

"Oh, Felkin. No." Imogen's face was a little quizzical. "It couldn't be managed. I thought it over, what you said about sacrificing other people's needs to her luxuries, and felt that you were right. So I put it to her, very, very gently of course, very tactfully, so that I believe that she thinks that it was she who initiated the idea. Perhaps she *had* intended from the first to send her back, it was so obvious that a woman as poor as she is ought not to have a maid. All the same, I felt that she was a little vexed with me, poor dear. But, apart from the economical question, I'm glad I insisted. It's so much better for her not to be so dependent on another woman. It's a little degrading for both of them, I think."

Jack, who theoretically disapproved of all such undemocratic gauds, was sure that Mrs. Upton was much better off without her maid, yet something of the pathos of that image remained with him—the child deprived of its toy. Something too, of discomfort over that echo of her father that he now and then detected in Imogen's serene sense of rightness.

This discomfort, this uneasy sense of echoes, returned more than once in the days that followed. Mrs. Upton seemed, as yet, to have made very little difference in the situation, she had glided into it, smoothly, unobtrusively—a silken shadow, when she was among them it was of that she made him think; and in her shadowed quietness, as of a tranquil mist at evening or at dawn, he more and more came to feel a sense of peace and sweetness. But in this

sweetness and peace stirred always the contrasting throb of restlessness.

He saw her at the meals he frequently attended, meals where the conversation, for the most part, was carried on by Imogen. Mrs. Wake, also a frequent guest, was a very silent one and Mary an earnest listener.

If Imogen's talk had ceased to be very interesting to Jack, that was only because he knew it so well. He knew it so well that, while she talked, quietly, fluently, dominatingly, he was able to remain the dispassionate observer and to wonder how it impressed her mother. Jack watched Mrs. Upton, while Imogen talked, leaning her head on her hand and raising contemplative eyes to her daughter. Those soft, dark eyes, eyes almost somnolent under their dusky brows and half drooped lashes—how different they were from Imogen's, as different as dusk from daylight. And they were not really sad, not really sleepy eyes, that was the surprise of them when, after the downcast mystery, they raised suddenly upon you their penetrating intelligence. The poetry of their aspect was constantly contradicted by the prose of their glance. But she did more than turn her own poetry into prose, so he told himself, she turned other people's into prose, too. Her glance became to him a running translation of Imogen's soarings into sane, almost merry commonplace. He knew that she made the translation and he knew that it was a translation into prose, but its meaning she kept for herself. It was when he felt, now and again, that he had hit upon a word, a phrase of it that the discomfort, the bewilderment came, and he would then turn resolutely to Imogen and grasp firmly his own conception of her

essential meaning, a meaning that could bear any amount of renderings.

She was so beautiful, sitting there, the girl he loved, her pearly face and throat, her coronet of pale, bright gold rising from the pathetic blackness, that it might well be that her mother felt only his own joy in her loveliness and could spare no margin of consciousness for critical comment. She was so lovely, so young, so good, so jaded too with all the labour, the giving of herself, the long thoughts for others—why shouldn't she be dominant and assured? why shouldn't she even be didactic and slightly complacent? If there was sometimes a triteness in her pronouncements, a lack of humour, of spontaneity in her enthusiasms, surely no one who loved her could recognize them with any but the tenderest of smiles. He felt quite sure that Mrs. Upton recognized them with nothing else. He felt quite sure that the "deepest" thing in Mrs. Upton was the most intense interest in Imogen; but he felt sure, too, that the thing above it, the thing that gazed so quietly, so dispassionately, was complete indifference as to what Imogen might be saying. Didn't her prose, with its unemphatic evenness, imply that some enthusiasms went quite without saying, and that some questions were quite disposed of for talk just because they were so firmly established for action? When he had reached this point of query Jack felt rising within him that former sense of irritation on Imogen's behalf, and on his own. After all, youthful triteness and enthusiasm were preferable to indifference. In the stress of this irritation he felt at moments a shock of keen sympathy for the departed Mr. Upton, who had, no doubt, often felt that disconcerting blend of interest and indifference weigh upon

his dithyrambic ardours. He often felt very sorry for Mr. Upton as he looked at his widow. It was safer to feel that than to feel sorry for her while he listened to Imogen. It did not do to realize too keenly, through Imogen's echo, what it must have been to listen to Mr. Upton for a lifetime. When, on rare occasions, he had Mrs. Upton to himself, his impulse always was to "draw her out," to extract from her what were her impressions of things in general and what her attitude towards life. She must really, by this time, have enough accepted him as one of themselves to feel his right to hear all sorts of impressions. He was used to talking things over, talking them, indeed, over and over, turning them, surveying them, making the very most of all their possible significance, with men and women to whom his relationship was half brotherly and wholly comradely, and whom, in the small, fresh, clear world where he had spent his life, he had known since boyhood. It was a very ethical and intellectual little world, this of Jack's, where impressions passed from each to each, as if by right, where some suspicion was felt for those that could not be shared, and where to keep anything so worth while to oneself was almost to rob a whole circle. Reticence was felt to have the distinct flavour of selfishness and uncertainty of mind the flavour of laxity. If you were earnest and ardent and disciplined you either knew what you thought, and shared it, or you knew what you wanted to think, and sought it. Jack suspected Mrs. Upton of being neither earnest, nor ardent, nor disciplined, but he found it difficult to believe that, as a new inmate of his world, she couldn't be, if only she would make the effort to be so, as clear as the rest of it; he found it difficult to believe that

she wasn't as ready, if manipulated with tact and sympathy, to give and to receive.

Wandering about the drawing-room, while, as usual in her leisure moments, she crocheted a small jacket, Tison in her lap, he wondered, for instance, what she thought of the drawing-room. He knew that it was very different from the drawing-room in her Surrey cottage, and very different from the drawing-rooms with which, as he had heard from Imogen, she was familiar in the capitals of Europe. Mrs. Upton was to-day crocheting a blue border as peacefully as though she had faced pseudo Corregios and crimson brocade and embossed wallpaper all her life, so that either her tastes shared the indifference of her intelligence or else her power of self control was commendably complete.

"I hope that you are coming to Boston some day," he said to her on this occasion, the occasion of the blue border. "I'd like so much to show you my studio there, and my work. I'm not such an idler as you might imagine."

Mrs. Upton replied that she should never for a moment imagine him an idler and that since she was going to Boston to stay with his great-aunt, a dear but too infrequently seen friend of hers, she hoped soon for the pleasure of seeing his work. "I hear that you are very talented," she added.

Jack, who considered that he was, did not protest with a false modesty, but went on to talk of the field of art in general, and questioning her, sceptical as to her statement that her artistic tastes were a mere medley, he put together by degrees a conception of vague dislikes and sharp preferences. But, in spite of his persistence in keeping her to Chardin and Japanese prints,

she would pass on from herself to Imogen, emphasizing her satisfaction in Imogen's great interest in art. "It's such a delightful bond between people." And Mrs. Upton, with her more than American parental discretion, smiled her approval of such bonds.

Jack reflected for some moments before saying that Imogen knew, perhaps, more than she cared. He didn't think that Imogen had exactly the aesthetic temperament. And that there was no confidential flavour in these remarks he demonstrated by adding that it was a point he and Imogen often discussed; he had often told her that she should try to feel more and to think less, so that Valerie might have amusedly recalled Imogen's explanation to her of the fundamental frankness that made lovers in America such "remarkable young men." Jack's frankness, evidently, would be restrained by neither diffidence nor affection. She received his diagnosis of her daughter's case without comment, saying only, after a moment, while she turned a corner of her jacket: "And you are of the artistic temperament, I suppose?"

"Well, yes," he owned, "in a sense, though not in that in which the word has been so often misused. I don't see the artist as a performing acrobat, nor as an anarchist in ethics either. I think that art is one of the big aspects of life, and that through it one gets hold of a big part of reality." Mrs. Upton, mildly intent on her corner, looked acquiescent.

"I think," Jack went on, "that, like everything else in life worth having, it's a harmony only attained by discipline and by sacrifice. And it's essentially a social, not a selfish attainment; it widens our boundaries of comprehension and sympathy; it reveals brotherhood. The artist's is a high form of service.

He suspected Mrs. Upton, while he spoke, of disagreement; he suspected her also of finding him sententious; but she continued to look interested, so that, quite conscious of his didactic purpose and amused by all the things he saw in their situation, he unfolded to her his conception of the artist's place in the social organism. She said finally: "I should have thought that art was much more of an end in itself."

"Ah, there we come to the philosophy of it," said Jack. "It *is*, of course, a sort of mysticism. One lays hold of something eternal in all achievement; but then, you see, one finds out that the eternal isn't cut up into sections, as it were—art here, ethics there, intellect yonder; one finds out that all that is eternal is bound up with the whole, so that you can't separate beauty from goodness and truth any more than you can divide a man's moral sense from his artistic and rational interests."

"Still, it's in sections for us, surely? What very horrid people can be great artists," Mrs. Upton half questioned, half mused.

"Ah, I don't believe it! I don't believe it!" Jack broke out. "You'll find a flaw in his art if you find a moral chaos in him. It must be a harmony!"

The corner was long since turned, and on a simple stretch of blue Mrs. Upton now looked up at him with a smile that showed him that whether she liked what he said or not, she certainly liked him. It was here that the slight bewilderment came in, to feel that had he been upholding some unmoral doctrine she would have smiled in just the same way, and the bewilderment was greater on feeling how much he liked her to like him. Over the didactic intentions, a boyish, an answering smile irradiated his face.

"I'm not much of a thinker, but I suppose that it does all come together, somehow," she said.

"I'm sure that you make a great deal of beauty, wherever you are," Jack answered irrelevantly. "I've heard that your cottage in England is so charming. Mrs. Wake was telling me about it."

"It is a dear little place."

He remembered suddenly that the room where they talked contradicted his assertion, and, glancing about it furtively, his eye traversed the highly glazed surface of the Corregio.

Mrs. Upton's glance followed his. "I don't think I ever cared so seriously about beauty," she said, smiling quietly. "I lived, you see, for a good many years in this room, just as it is." There was no pathos in her voice. Jack brought it out for her.

"I am sure you hated it!"

"I thought it ugly, of course; but I didn't mind so much as all that. I didn't mind, really, so much as you would."

"Not enough to try to have it right?"

He was marching his ethics into it, and with his question he felt, now, that he had brought Mr. Upton right down from the wall and between them. Mr. Upton had not minded the room at all, or had minded only in the sense that he made it a matter of conscience not to mind. And aspects of it Mr. Upton had thought beautiful. And that Mrs. Upton felt all this he was sure from the very vagueness of her answer.

"That would have meant caring more for beauty than for more important things in life."

He knew that it was in horribly bad taste, but he couldn't help having it out, now that he had involuntarily gone so far. "If you like Chardin, I'm sure

that that hurts you," and he indicated the pseudo-Corregio, this time openly.

She followed his gesture with brows of mildly lifted inquiry. "You mean it's not genuine?"

"That, and a great deal more. It's imitation, and it's bad imitation, and, anyway, the original would be out of place here, on that wall paper."

But Mrs. Upton wouldn't be clear, wouldn't be drawn, wouldn't, simply, share. She shook her head; she smiled, as though he must accept from her her lack of proper feeling, repeating: "I didn't like it, but, really, I never minded much." And he had to extract what satisfaction he could from her final vague summing up: "It went with the chairs, and all the rest."

CHAPTER X

"MAMMA," said Imogen, "who is Sir Basil?" She had picked up a letter from the hall table as she and Jack passed on their way upstairs after their walk, and she carried it into the library with the question.

Mrs. Upton was making tea beside the fire, Mrs. Wake and Mary with her, and as Imogen held out the letter with its English stamp and masculine handwriting a dusky rose-colour mounted to her face. Indeed, in taking the letter from her daughter's hand, her blush was so obvious that a slight silence of recognized and shared embarrassment made itself felt. It was Jack who felt it most. After his swiftly averted glance at Mrs. Upton his own cheeks had flamed in ignorant sympathy. He was able, in a moment, to see that it might have been the fire, or the tea, or the mere suddenness of an unexpected question that had caused the look of helpless girlishness, but the memory of it stayed with him.

Imogen, apparently, had seen nothing. She went on, pulling off her gloves, taking off her hat, glancing at her radiant white and rose in the glass while she questioned: "I remember him in your letters, but remember him so little. A dull, kind old country squire, the impression, I think; but what does a dull, kind old country squire find to write about so often?"

If Mrs. Upton couldn't control her cheeks she could perfectly control her manner, and though Jack in his sympathy guessed at some pretty decisive irritation under it, he could but feel that its calm disposed of any absurd interpretations that the blush might have aroused.

"Yes, I have often, I think, mentioned him in my letters, Imogen, though not in those terms. He is a neighbour of mine in Surrey and a friend."

"Is he clever?" Imogen asked, ignoring the coolness of her mother's voice.

"Not particularly."

"What does he do, Mamma?"

"He takes care of his property."

"Sport and feudal philanthropy, I suppose," Imogen smiled.

"Very much just that," Mrs. Upton answered, pouring out her daughter's tea. Jack, who almost expected to see Imogen's brow darken with reprobation for the type of existence so described, was relieved, and at the same time perturbed, to observe that the humorous kindliness of her manner remained unclouded. No doubt she found the subject too trivial and too remote for gravity. Jack himself had a general idea that serious friendships between man and woman were adapted only to the young and the unmated. After marriage, according to this conception, the sexes became, even in social intercourse, monogamous, and he couldn't feel the bond between Mrs. Upton and a feudal country squire as a matter of much importance. But, on the other hand, Mrs. Upton had said "friend" with decision, and though the word, for her, could not mean what it meant to people like himself and Imogen—a grave, a beautiful bond of mutual

help, mutual endeavour, mutual rejoicing in the wonder and splendour of life—even a trivial relationship was not a fit subject for playful patronage. It was with sharp disapprobation that he heard Imogen go on to say, "I should like to meet a man like that—really to know. One imagines that they are as extinct as the dodo, and suddenly, if one goes to England, one finds them swarming. Happy, decorative, empty people; perfectly kind, perfectly contented, perfectly useless. Oh, I don't mean your Sir Basil a bit, Mamma darling. I'm quite sure, since you like him, that he is a more interesting variation of the type. Only I can't help wondering what he *does* find to write about."

"I think, as I am wondering myself, I will ask you all to excuse me if I open my letter," said Mrs. Upton, and, making no offer of satisfying Imogen's curiosity, she unfolded two stout sheets of paper and began to read them.

Imogen did not lose her look of lightness, but Jack thought he detected a controlled anger in the steady gaze she bent upon her mother.

"One may be useful, Imogen, without wearing any badge of usefulness," Mrs. Wake now observed. Her bonnet, as usual, on one side and her hair much disarranged, she had listened to the colloquy in silence.

Imogen was always very sweet with Mrs. Wake. She had the air of a full, deep river benignly willing to receive without a ripple any number of tossed pebbles, to engulf and flow over them. She had told Jack that Mrs. Wake's dry aggressiveness did not blind her for a moment to Mrs. Wake's noble qualities. Mrs. Wake was a brave, a splendid person, and she had the greatest admiration for her; but, beneath these appreciations,

a complete indifference as to Mrs. Wake's opinions and personality showed always in her demeanour towards her. She was a splendid person but she was of no importance to Imogen whatever.

"I don't think that one can be useful unless one is actively helping on the world's work, dear Mrs. Wake," she now said. "Mary, we have tickets for Carnegie Hall to-morrow night; won't that be a treat? I long for a deep draught of music."

"One does help it on," said Mrs. Wake, tossing another pebble, "if one fills one's place in life and does one's duty."

Imogen now gave her a more undivided attention. "Precisely. And one must grow all the time to do that. One's place in life is a growing thing. It doesn't remain fixed and changeless, as English conservatism usually implies. Are you a friend of Sir Basil's, too?"

"I met him while I was with your mother, and I thought it a pity we didn't produce more men like him over here, simple, unself-conscious men, contented to be themselves and to do the duty that is nearest them."

"Anglomaniac!" Imogen smiled, sugaring her second cup of tea.

Mrs. Wake flushed slightly. "Because I see the good qualities of another country?"

"Because you see its defects with a glamour over them."

"Is it a defect to do well by instinct what we have not yet learned to do without effort?"

"Ah, but the danger there is—" Jack here broke in, much interested, "the danger there is that you merge the individual in the function. When function becomes

instinctive it atrophies unless it can grow into higher forms of function. Imogen's right, you know."

"In a sense, no doubt. But all the same our defect is that we have so little interest except as individuals."

"What more interest can any one have than that?"

"In older civilizations people may have all the accumulated interest of the deep background, the long past that, quite unconsciously, they embody."

"We have the interest of the future."

"I don't think so, quite; for the individual, the future doesn't seem to count. The individual is sacrificed to the future, but the past is, in a sense, made present in the individual—; in the right sort it's all there summed up."

Imogen had listened, still with her steady smile, to these heresies and to Jack's over-lenient dealing with them. She picked up a review, turning the pages and glancing through it while she said, ever so lightly and gently, "I think that you would find most aristocrats against you in our country, dear Mrs. Wake. With all the depth of our background, the length of our past, you would find, in Jack and Mary and me for instance, that it's our sense of the future, of our own purposes for it, that makes our truest reality."

Jack was rather pleased with this apt dismissal of the matter, too pleased, in his masculine ingenuousness, to feel that for Mrs. Wake, with no ancestry at all to speak of, such a dismissal could not be very gratifying. He didn't see this at all until Mrs. Upton, folding her letter, came into the slightly awkward silence that followed Imogen's speech, with the decisiveness that had subtly animated her manner since Imogen's entrance. She remarked that the past, in that sense of hereditary

tradition handed on by hereditary power, didn't exist at all in America; it was just that fact that made America so different and so interesting; its aristocrats so often had the shallowest of backgrounds. And in her gliding to a change of subject, in her addressing of an entirely foreign question to Mrs. Wake, Jack guessed at a little flare of resentment on her friend's behalf. Imogen kept her calm, and while her mother talked to Mrs. Wake she talked to Mary; but that the calm was assumed she showed him presently when they were left alone. She then showed him, indeed, that she was frankly angry.

"One doesn't mind Mrs. Wake," she said. "It's that type among us, the type without background, without traditions, that is so influenced by the European thing; but to have Mamma so dead to all we mean!"

Jack, rather embarrassed by the pressure of his enlightenments, said that he hadn't felt that; it seemed to him that she did see what they meant, it was their future that counted, in the main.

"A rootless future, according to her!"

"Why, we have our past; it's the way we possess it that's new in the world; that's what she meant. Any little advantage that you or I may have in our half dozen or so generations of respectability and responsibility, is ours only to share, to make us *tell* more in the general uplifting."

"You think that you need say that to *me*, Jack! As for respectability, that homespun word hardly applies; we do have lineage here, and in the European sense, even if without the European power. But that's no matter. It's the pressing down on me of this alien standard, whether expressed or not, that stifles me.

I could feel Mamma's hostility in every word, every glance."

"Hardly hostility, Imogen. Perhaps a touch of vexation on Mrs. Wake's account. You didn't mean it, of course, but it might have hurt, what you said."

"That! That was a mere opportunity. Didn't you feel and see that it was?"

Jack's aspect now took on its air of serious and reasonable demonstration.

"Well, you know, Imogen, you were a little tactless about her friendship—about this Sir Basil."

He expected wonder and denial, but, on the contrary, going to the window and looking out silently for some moments, Imogen, without turning, said: "It's not a friendship I care about."

"Why not?" Jack asked, taken aback.

"I don't like it," Imogen repeated.

"Why under the sun should you dislike it? What do you know about it, anyway?"

Imogen still gazed from the window. "Jack, I don't believe that Mamma is at all the woman to have friends, as we understand the word. I don't believe that it is simply a friendship. Yes, you may well look surprised," she had turned to him now. "I've never told you. It seemed unfair to her. But again and again I've caught whispers, hints, about the sentimental attachments Mamma inspires. You may imagine how I've felt, living here with *him*, in his loneliness. I don't say, I don't believe, that Mamma was ever a flirt; she is too dignified, too distinguished a woman for that; but the fact remains that whispers of this sort do attach themselves to her name, and a woman is always to blame, in some sense, for that."

Jack, looking as startled as she had hoped he would,

gazed now with frowning intentness on the ground and made no reply,

"As for this Sir Basil," Imogen went on, "I used to wonder if he were another of these triflers with the sanctity of love, and of late I've wondered more. He writes to her constantly. What can the bond between Mamma and a man of that type be unless it's a sentimental one? And didn't you see her blush to-day?"

Jack now raised his eyes to her and she saw that he, at all events, was blushing. "I can't bear to hear you talk like this, Imogen," he said.

Imogen's own cheeks flamed at the implied reproach. "Do you mean that I must lock everything, everything I have to suffer into my own heart? I thought that to you, Jack, I could say anything."

"Of course, of course, dear. Only don't *think* in this way."

"I accuse her of nothing but accepting this sort of homage."

"I know—of course—only, not even to me;—they are friends. We have no right to spy upon them; it's almost as if you had laid a trap for her and then pointed her out to me in it. Oh, I know that you didn't mean it so."

"Spy upon her! I only wanted to know!"

"But your tone was, well, rather offensively humorous."

"Can you feel that a friendship to be taken seriously? The very kindest thing is to treat it lightly, humorously, as I did. She ought to be laughed out of tolerating such an unbecoming relationship. A woman of her age ought not to be able to blush like that."

Looking down again, still with his deep flush,

Jack said: "Really, Imogen, I think that you take too much upon yourself."

Imogen felt her cheeks whiten. She fixed her eyes hard on his downcast face. "It will be the last touch to all I have to bear, Jack, if Mamma brings misunderstanding between you and me. If you can feel it fitting, appropriate, that a widow of barely four months should encourage the infatuation of a stupid old Englishman, then I have no more to say. We have different conceptions of right and wrong, that is all." Imogen's lips trembled slightly in pronouncing the words.

"I should agree with you if that were the case, Imogen. I don't believe that it is."

"Very well. Wait and see if it isn't the case," said Imogen.

It was Jack who broached another subject, asking her about some concerts she had gone to recently; but turned from him again and looking out into the evening, her answers were so vague and chill that, casting a glance half mournful and half alarmed upon her, he presently bade her good-bye and left her.

Imogen stood looking out unseeingly, a sense of indignation and of fear weighing upon her. Jack had never before left her like this. But she could not yield to the impulse to call out to him, run after him, beg him not to go with a misunderstanding unresolved between them, for she was right and he was wrong. She had told him to wait and see if it wasn't the case, what she had said; and they must wait now. She believed that it was the case, and the thought filled her with a sense of personal humiliation.

Since her summing up of the situation in the library, not three months ago, that first quiet sense of mastery

had been much shaken, and now for weeks strange new realizations had been gliding into her life. This one seemed the last touch to her mother's wrongness—a wrongness that had threatened nothing, had crushed down on nothing, and that yet pervaded everything more and more—that she should bring back to her old deserted home not a touch of penitence and the incense of absurd devotions. Friends of that sort, middle-aged, dull Englishmen, didn't, Imogen had wisely surmised, write to one every week. It was not as if they had uniting interests to bind them. Even a literary, a political, a philanthropic correspondence Imogen would have felt as something of an affront to her father's memory, now, at this time; such links with the life that had always been a scar upon their family dignity should have been laid aside while the official mourning lasted, so to speak. But Sir Basil, she felt sure, had had no mitigating interests to write about, and the large, square envelope that lay so often on the hall-table seemed to her like a pert, placid face gazing in at the house of mourning. To-day, yes, she had wanted to know, to see, and suspicions and resentments from dim had become keen.

And now, to complete it all, Jack did not understand. Jack thought her unfair, unkind. He had left her with that unresolved discord between them. A sense of bereavement, foreboding and desolation filled her heart. On the table beside her stood a tall vase of lilies that he had sent her, and as she stood, thinking sad and bitter thoughts, she passed her hand over them from time to time, bending her face to them, till, suddenly, the tears rose and fell, and closing her eyes, holding the flowers against her cheek, she began to cry.

That was what she had meant to be like, the pure,

sweet aroma of these flowers, filling all the lives about her with a spiritual fragrance. She did so want to be good and lovely, to make goodness and loveliness grow about her. It was hard, hard, when that was what she wanted—all that she wanted—to receive these buffets from loved hands, to see loved eyes look at her with trouble and severity. It was nothing indeed, it was indeed only to be expected, that her mother should not recognize the spiritual fragrance; that Jack should be so insensible to it pierced her. And feeling herself alone in a blind and hostile world, she sobbed and sobbed, finding a sad relief in tears. She was able to think while she wept, that though it was a relief she mustn't let it become a weakness; mustn't let herself slide into the danger of allowing grief and desolation to blur outlines for her. That others were blind mustn't blind her; that others did not see her as good and lovely must not make her, with cowardly complaisance, forswear her own clear consciousness of right. She was thinking this, and her sobs were becoming a little quieter, when her mother, now in her evening tea-gown, came back into the room.

Imogen was not displeased that her grief should be thus witnessed. Besides all the deep, unspoken wrongs, her mother must be conscious of having wronged her this afternoon in smaller ways, must know that she had—well—tried to put her, as it were, in her place about the letter and about Mrs. Wake. She must know this and must know that Imogen knew it. These were trivial matters, not to be recognized between them; and how completely indifferent they were to her her present grief would demonstrate. Such tears fell only for great sorrows. Holding the flowers to her cheek, she wept on, turning her face away. She knew

that her mother had paused, startled, at a loss, and, gravely, without one word, she intended, in a moment, unless her mother should think it becoming to withdraw, to leave the room, still weeping. But she had not time to carry this resolution into effect. Suddenly, and much to her dismay, she felt her mother's arms around her, while her mother's voice, alarmed, tender, tearful, came to her. "Poor darling, my poor darling, what is it? Please tell me."

Physical demonstrations were never pleasing to Imogen, who, indeed, disliked being touched; and now, though she submitted to having her head drawn down to her mother's shoulder, she could not feel that the physical contact in any way bridged the chasm between them. She felt, presently, from her mother's inarticulate murmurs of compunction and pity, that this bond of animal sympathy was, apparently, what she had hoped for. It was evidently with difficulty, before her child's unresponsive silence, that she found words.

"Is it anything that I've done?" she questioned. "Have I seemed cross this afternoon? I *was* a little cross, I know. Do forgive me, dear."

Enveloped as she was in her mother's arms, so near that she could feel the warmth and smoothness of her shoulder through the fine texture of her gown, so near that a fresh fragrance, like that from a bank of violets, seemed to breath upon her, Imogen found it a little difficult to control the discomfort that the contact aroused in her. "Of course I forgive you, dear mamma," she said, in a voice that had regained its composure. "But, oh no—it was not at all for that—I hardly noticed it. It's nothing that you can help, dear."

"But I can't bear to have you cry and not know what's the matter."

" Your knowing wouldn't help me, would it ? " said Imogen with a faint smile, lifting her hand to press her handkerchief to her eyes.

" No, of course not ; but it would help *me* : for my sake, then."

" Then, if it helps you, it was Papa I was thinking of. I miss him so." And with the words, that placed before her suddenly a picture of her own desolation, a great sob again shook her. " I'm so lonely now, so lonely."

Her mother held her, not speaking, though Imogen now felt that she, too, wept, and a greater bitterness rose in her at the thought that it was not for her dead father that the tears fell but in pure weak sympathy and helplessness. She, herself, was the only lonely one. She alone remembered. She alone longed for him. In this sharpened realization of her own sorrow she forgot that it had not been the actual cause of her grief.

" Poor darling ; poor child," her mother said at last. " Imogen, I know that I've failed in so much. But I want so to make up for things, if I can ; to be near you—to fill the loneliness a little. To have you love me, too, with time."

" Love you, my dear mother ? Why I am full of love for you—haven't you felt that ? " Imogen drew herself away to look her grieved wonder into her mother's eyes. " Oh, Mamma, how little you know me ! "

Valerie flushed, the tears on her cheeks, oddly shaken from her usual serenity, still held her daughter's shoulders and still spoke on. " I know, I know ; but it's not in the way it ought to be. It's not your fault, Imogen ; it's mine. It must be the mother's fault if she can't make herself needed. Only you can't know how it all began, from so far back, that

sense that you didn't need me. But I shirked; I know that I shirked. Things seemed too hard for me. I didn't know how to bear them. Perhaps you might have come almost to hate me if I had stayed, as things were. I'm not making any appeal. I'm not trying to force anything; but I so want you to know how I long to have my chance, to begin all over again. I so want you to help."

Imogen, troubled and confused by her mother's soft yet almost passionate eagerness, that seemed to pull her down to some childish, inferior place, just as her mother's arms had drawn down her head to an attitude incongruous with its own benignant loftiness, had yet been able, while she spoke, to gather her thoughts into a keen, moral concentration upon her actual words. She was accustomed, in moments of moral stress, to a quick lifting of her heart and mind for help and insight towards the highest that she knew, and she felt herself pray now: "Help me to be true, to her, for her." The prayer seemed to raise her from some threatened abasement, and from her regained height she spoke with a sense of assured revelation. "We can't have things by merely *wanting* them. To gain anything we must *work* for it. You left us. We didn't shut you out. You were different—you *are* different."

But her mother's vehemence was still too great to be thrown back by salutary truths.

"Yes; that's just it: we were different. It was that that seemed to shut me out. You were with him—against me. And I'm not asking for any change in you; I don't think that I expect any change in myself. I am not asking for any place in your heart that is his, dear child; I know that that can't be, should not be. But people can be different and yet near. They can

be different and yet love each other very much. That's all I want : that you should see how I care for you—and trust me."

" I do trust you, darling Mamma. I do see that you are warm-hearted, full of kind impulses. But I think that your life is confused, uncertain of any goal. If you are to be near me in the way you crave, you must change. And we *can*, dear, with faith and effort. When you have found yourself, found a goal, I shall feel you near."

" Ah, but don't be so over-logical, dear child. You're my goal ! " Valerie smiled and appealed at once.

Imogen, though smiling gravely, too, shook her head. " I'm afraid that I'm only your last toy, Mamma darling. You have come over here to see if you can make me happy, just as if you were refurnishing a house. But, you see, my happiness doesn't depend on you."

" You are hard on me, Imogen."

" No, no ; I mean to be so gentle. It's such a dangerous view of life, that centreing it on some one else, making them an end. I feel so differently about life. I think that our love for others is only sound and true when it helps them to power of service, to some shared ideal. Your love for me isn't like that. It's only an instinctive craving. Forgive me if I seem ruthless. I only want to help you to see clearly, dear."

Valerie, still holding her daughter's hands, looked away from her and around the room with a glance at once vague and a little wild. " I don't know what to say to you," she murmured. " You make all that I mean wither."

She was sad ; her ardour had dropped from her. She was not at all convicted of error ; indeed she was

trying, so it seemed, to convict her, Imogen, of one. Imogen felt a cold resistance rising within her to meet this misinterpretation. "On the contrary, dear," she said, "it is just the poetry, the reality of life, in all its stern glory—because it is and must be stern if it is to be spiritual—it is just that, it seems to me, that you are trying to reduce to a sort of pretty, facile lyric."

Valerie still held the girl's shoulders very tightly, as though grasping hard some dying hope. And looking down upon the ground she stood silent for some moments. Presently she said, not raising her eyes: "I have won no right, I suppose, to be seen more significantly by you. Only, I want you to understand that I don't see myself like that."

Again Imogen felt the unpleasant sensation of being made to seem young and inexperienced. Her mother's very quiet before exhortation; her sad relapse into grave kindliness, a kindliness, too, not without its touch of severity, showed that she possessed, or thought that she possessed, some inner assurance for which Imogen could find no ground. In answering her she grasped at all her own.

"I'm very sure you don't," she said, "for I don't for one moment misjudge your sincerity. And what I want you to believe, my dear mother, is that I long for the time when any strength and insight I may have gained through my long fight, by *his* side, may be of use to you. *Trust* your own best vision of yourself and it will some day, realize itself. I will trust it too, indeed, indeed I will. We must grow if we keep a vision."

Mrs. Upton now raised her eyes and looked swiftly but deeply at her daughter. It was a look that left many hopes behind it. It was a look that armed

other and quite selfless hopes with its grave and watchful understanding. The understanding would not have been so clear had it not been fed by all the springs of baffled tenderness that only so could find their uses. Giving her daughter's hands a final shake, as if over some compact, perhaps over that suggested compact of growth, she turned away. Tison, who had followed her into the room and had stood for long looking up at the colloquy that ignored him, jumped against her dress, and she stooped and picked him up, pressing her cheek against his silken side. " You had better dress now, Imogen," she said, in tones of astonishing commonplace. " You've only time. I've kept you so long." And holding Tison against her cheek she went to the window.

CHAPTER XI

THE tableaux were not to come off until the end of April, and Jack, having set things in motion, was in Boston at the beginning of the month. It was at this time that Mrs. Upton too was in Boston, with her old friend, Miss Pennington, and it was at this time that he came, as he phrased it to himself, really into touch with her.

Jack's aunt lived in a spacious, peaceful house on the hill, and the windows of Jack's large flat, near by, looked over the common, the gardens, the Charles river, a cheerful, bird's-eye view of the tranquil city, breathed upon now by the first, faint green of spring.

Jack was pleased that Mrs. Upton and his aunt—a mild, blanched old lady with silvery side curls under the arch of an old-fashioned bonnet—should often come to tea with him, for in the arrangement of his rooms—that looked so unarranged—he felt sure that she must recognize a taste as fine and fastidious as her own. He suspected Mrs. Upton of finding him merely ethical, and he was eager that she should see that his grasp on life was larger than she might imagine. His taste was fine and fastidious, disciplined and gracefully vagrant; she must see that—in the few but perfect pictures and mezzotints on his walls, in the collection of old white Chinese porcelain standing about the room on black carved stands, in his wonderful black lacquer cabinets,

and all the charming medley of the rare and the appropriate.

Certainly, whatever was Mrs. Upton's impression of him she frequently expressed herself as delighted with his rooms, and as they sat in the deep window-seat which commanded the view of the city, he felt more and more sure that whatever that impression of him might be, it rested upon an essential liking. It was pleasant to Jack to feel sure of this, little as he might be able to justify to himself his gratification. Somehow, with Mrs. Upton, he didn't find himself occupied with justifying things. The ease that she had always made for him shone out now uninterruptedly, and as they talked, while the dear old aunt sat near, turning the leaves of a book, joining in with a word now and then, it was, in the main, the soft, sweet sense of ease, like the breath of violets in the air, that surrounded him. They talked of all sorts of things, or rather, as he said to himself, they babbled; for real talk could hardly be so discursive, so aimless, so merely merry. She made him think of a child playing with a lapful of flowers: that was what her talk was like. She would spread them out in formal rows, arrange them in pretty, intricate posies, or, suddenly, gather them into generous handfuls, which she gave you with a pleased glance and laugh. It was queer to find a person who took all "talk" so lightly and who yet, he felt quite sure, took some things hard. It was like the contrast between her indolent face and her clear, unbiassed gaze, that wouldn't flinch or deceive itself from or about anything that it met. Apparently most of the things that it met she didn't take solemnly. The world, as far as he could guess, was for her mainly made up of rather trivial things; but, with his new

sense of enlightenment, he more and more came to realize that it might be so made up and yet, to her apprehension, be very bad, very sad, and very worthwhile too. And after seeing her as a child playing with flowers he could imagine her in some suddenly heroic rôle; as one of the softly nurtured women of the French Revolution, for instance, a creature made up of little gaieties, little griefs, of sprigged silk and gossamer, powder and patches, blossoming, among the horrors of a hopeless prison, into courageous graces. She would smile, talk, play cards with them, those doomed ones, she herself also doomed; she would make life's last day livable, in every exquisite sense of the word. And he could see her in the tumbril, her arm round a terrified girl; he could see her mounting the steps of the guillotine, perhaps with no upward glance to heaven, and yet with a composure as resolute and as serene as any saint's.

These were strange visions to cross his mind as they sat and talked, while she made posies for him; and even when they did not hover he often found himself dwelling with a sort of touched tenderness upon something vaguely pathetic in her. Perhaps it was only that he found it pathetic to see her look so young when, measured beside his own contrasted youth, he felt how old she was. It was pathetic that eyes so clear should fade, that a cheek so rounded should wither, that the bloom and softness and freshness expressed in her whole being should be evanescent. Jack was not given to such meditations, having a robust, transcendental indifference to earthly gauds unless he could fit them into ethical significances. It was, indeed, no beauty such as Imogen's that he felt in Mrs. Upton. He was not consciously aware that her loveliness was

of a subtler, finer quality than her daughter's. She did not remind him of a Madonna nor of anything connected with a temple. But the very fact that he couldn't tabulate and pigeon-hole her with some uplifting analogy made her appeal the most direct that he had ever experienced. The dimness of her lashes; the Japanese-like oddity of her smile; the very way in which her hair turned up from her neck with an eddy of escaping tendrils—these things pervaded his consciousness. He didn't like to think of her being hurt and unhappy, and he often wondered if she wasn't bound to be both. He wondered about her a great deal. He received, on every day they met, hints and illuminations, but never the clear revealment that he hoped for. The thing that grew surer and surer for him was her essential liking, and the thing that became sweeter and sweeter, though the old perplexity mingled with it, was the superficial amusement he caused her. One of the things that, he began to see, amused her a little was the catholicity of taste displayed in the books scattered about his rooms, the volumes of French and Italian that the great-aunt would take up while they talked. She felt, he was quite sure, that the books and his character were funnily incongruous, and that their presence there meant none of the things that, in another environment, they would have stood for, neither cosmopolitanism nor an unbiassed connoisseurship, interested in all the flowers of the human intelligence—the *fleurs du mal* among the rest. That they meant for him his own omniscient appreciation unshakedly sure of the ethical category into which he could place each fruit—however ominous its tainted ripeness—each flower—however freaked with perverse tints—he saw her mildly sceptical; and he felt, with just a flicker

of his old irritation, that the very plentifulness of aesthetic corruption that he could display to her testified to her of his essential guilelessness and, perhaps, to a blandness and narrowness of nature that lacked even the capacity for infection. Jack had to own to himself that, though he strove to make it rigorously aesthetic, his vision of d'Annunzio—to take at random one of the *fleurs du mal*—was as a shining, a luridly splendid warning of what happened to decadent people in unpleasant Latin countries. Such lurid splendour was as far from him as the horrors of the Orestean Trilogy. In Mrs. Upton's eyes this distance, though a distinct advantage for him, was the result of no choice or conflict, but of environment merely, and she probably thought that the problems of Nietzschean ethics were not to be solved and disposed of by people whom they could never touch. But all the same, and it was here that the atoning softness came in, he felt that she liked him the better for being able to see a *fleur du mal* only as if it were a weird pressed product in a glass case. And if he amused her it was not because of any sense in her of superior wisdom ; she didn't deny her consciousness of wider contrasts, but she claimed no deeper insight—the very way in which she talked over the sinister people with him made that clear—asking him his opinion about this or that, and opening a volume here and there to read out, in her exquisite French or Italian, some passage whose full beauty he had never so realized before. Any criticsm or comment that she offered was, evidently, of the slightest weight in her own estimation ; but, there again one must remember, so many things seemed light to Mrs. Upton, so light, indeed, that he had often with her a sense of pressures removed, and of an altogether easier world.

" The trouble with him—with all his cleverness and beauty—is that his picture isn't true," Mrs. Upton said of d'Annunzio, standing with a volume in her hand in the clear afternoon light.

" True to him," Jack amended, alert for the displayal of his own comprehension.

" I can't think it. Life is always, for everybody, so much more commonplace than he dares make it. He is afraid of the commonplace ; he won't face it ; and the revenge life takes on people who do that, people who are really afraid, people who attitudinize, is to infect them in some subtle, mocking way with the very thing they are trying to escape."

" Well, but he isn't commonplace."

" No ; worse, he's silly." She had put down the book and taken up another, an older one. " Clough ; how far one must travel from d'Annunzio to come to him.

> **'It fortifies my soul to know**
> **That though I perish, Truth is so.' "**

She meditated the Stoic flavour.

" The last word of heroism, of faith," Jack said, thinking of the tumbril.

But Valerie turned the leaf a little petulantly. " Heroism ? Why ? "

" Why "—as usual he was glad to show her that, if she really wanted to see clearly, he could show her where clearness of the best sort lay—" Why, the man who can say that is free. He has abdicated every selfish claim to the highest."

" Highest ? Why should it fortify my soul to know that truth is ' so ' if ' so ' happens to be some man-devouring dragon of a world-power ? "

"Clough assumed, of course, that the truth was high; as it might be, even if it devoured one."

"I've no use for a truth that would have no better use for me," smiled Valerie, and on this he tried to draw her on, from her rejection of such heroism, to some exposal of her own conception of truth, her own opinions about life, a venture in which he always failed. Not that she purposely eluded. She listened, grave, interested; but when the time came for her to make her contribution, she merely fingered about metaphorically in a purse, which, though by no means empty, contained apparently a confused medley of coinage. If she could have found the right coin, she would have tendered it gladly; but she seemed to consider a vague chink as all that could be really desired of her, to take it for granted that he knew it was nothing of any value that he had lost.

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Sometimes he and Mrs. Upton, Tison trotting at their heels, took walks together, passing down the steep old streets, austere and cheerful, to the gardens, and along the wide avenue, with its lines of trees and broad strip of turf, on and out to the bridge that spanned the river. They enjoyed together the view of the pale expanse of water, placidly flowing in the windless sunshine, and, when they turned to come back, their favourite aspect of the town. They could see it then silhouetted in the vague greys and reds of its old houses, climbing from the purplish maze of tree-tops in the Common, climbing with a soft, jostling irregularity, to where the dim gold bubble of the State House dome rounded on the sky. So silhouetted it almost had the air of a Dürer etching.

"Dear place," Mrs. Upton would sigh restfully,

and that she was resting in all her stay here, resting from the demands of her new life, the adjustments it required of her, he was acutely aware. Resting from Imogen. Yes, why shouldn't he very simply face that fact? He too felt, for the first time, that Imogen had rather tired him and that he was glad of this interlude before taking up again the unresolved discord where they had left it. Imogen's last word about her mother had been that very ominous "Wait and see," and Jack felt that the discord had grown more complicated from the fact that, quite without waiting, he saw a great deal that Imogen, apparently, did not. He had seen so much that he was willing to wait for whatever else he was to see with very little perturbation of mind, and that, in the meanwhile, as many Sir Basils as it pleased Mrs. Upton to have write to her should do so.

But Mrs. Upton talked a great deal about Imogen, so much that he came to suspect her of adjusting the conversation to some supposed craving in himself. She had never asked a question about his relations with her daughter, accepting merely with interest any signs that he or she might choose to give her, but insinuating no hint of an appeal for more than they might choose to give. She probably took for granted what was the truth of the situation, that it rested with Imogen to make the situation definite. She did not treat him as an accepted lover, nor yet as a dejected one; she discriminated with the nicest delicacy. What she allowed herself to see, the ground she went upon, was his deep interest, his deep attachment. In that light he was admitted by degrees to an intimacy that, he knew, he could hardly have won so soon on his own merits. She had observed him; she had thought him

over ; she liked him for himself ; but, far more than this, she liked him for Imogen. He often guessed, from a word or look, at a deep core of feeling in her where her repressed, unemphatic, yet vigilant maternity, burned steadily. From her growing fondness for him he could gauge how fond she must be of Imogen. The nearness that this made for them would have been delightful to Jack, had it not been embittered by the familiar sense, sharper than ever now, of self-questioning and restlessness. A year ago, six months ago—no, three months only, just before her own coming, how exquisitely such sympathy, such understanding would have fitted into all his needs. He could have talked to her then by the hour, frankly, freely, joyously, about Imogen. And the restlessness now came of recognizing that it was just because of her coming, because of the soft clear light that she had so unconsciously, so revealingly diffused, that things had, in some odd way, taken on a new colour, so that the whole world, so that Imogen especially, looked different ; so that he couldn't any longer be altogether frank. It would have been part of the joy, three months ago, to talk over his loving perception of Imogen's little foibles and childishnesses, to laugh, with a loving listener, over her little complacencies and pomposities. He had taken them as lightly as that, then. They had really counted for nothing. Now, and all because of that clear, soft light, they had come to count for so much that he really couldn't laugh at them. He couldn't laugh at them, and since he couldn't do that he must keep silence over them, and as a result the talks about Imogen with Imogen's mother were, for his consciousness, a little random and at sea. Imogen's mother confidently based their community on a shared vision,

and that he kept back his real impression of what he saw was made all the worse by his intuition that she, too, kept back hers, that she talked from his supposed point of view, as it were, and didn't give him a glimmer of her own. She loved Imogen, or, perhaps, rather, she loved her daughter; but what did she think of Imogen? That was the question that had grown so sharp.

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On the day before he and Mrs. Upton went back together to New York, Jack gave a little tea that was almost a family affair.

One of their expeditions had been to Cambridge in Rose Packer's motor-car, and Eddy Upton had given them tea there, in his room overlooking the elms of the "Yard" at Harvard. Jack's tea was in some sort a return, for Eddy and Rose both came, and that Rose, in Eddy's eyes, didn't count as an outsider was now an accepted fact.

Eddy had taken the sudden revelation of his poverty with great coolness, and Jack admired the grim resolution with which he had cut down expenses while relaxing in no whit his hold on the nonchalant beauty.

Poverty would, to a certain extent, bar him out from Rose's sumptuous world, and Rose did not seem to take him very seriously as a suitor; but it was evident that Eddy did not intend to remain poor any longer than he could possibly help, and evident, too, that his assurance in regard to sentimental ambitions had its attractions for her. They chaffed and sparred with each other and under the flippant duel there flashed now and then signs of a more serious encounter. Rose denied the possession of a heart, but Eddy's wary steel might strike one day to a defenceless tender-

ness. She liked him, among many others, very much. And she was, as she frequently declared, in love with his mother. Jack never took Rose seriously; she remained for him a pretty, trivial, malicious child; but to-day he was pleased by the evidences of her devotion.

On this little occasion, Valerie presiding, everybody tossed nosegays, everybody seemed happy; and it was Rose, sitting in a low chair beside Mrs. Upton's sofa, who summed it up for Jack with the exclamation, "I do so love being with you, Mrs. Upton! What is it you do to make people so comfortable?"

"She doesn't do anything, people who do things make one uncomfortable," remarked Eddy, lounging in his chair and eating sandwiches. "She is, that's all."

"What is she then," Rose queried, her eyes fixed with fond effrontery on Valerie's face. "She's like everything nice, I know; nice things to look at, to hear, to taste, to smell, to touch. Let us do her portrait, Eddy, you know the analogy game. What flower does she remind you of? and what food? Acacia; raspberries and cream. What musical instrument? What animal? Help me, Jack."

"The musical instrument is a chime of silver bells," said Jack, while Valerie looked from one to the other with amused interest, "and the animal is, I think, a bird; a bright, soft-eyed bird, that flits and poises on tall grasses."

"Yes, that does. And now we will do you, Jack. You are like a very nervous, very brave dog."

"And like a Christmas rose," said Valerie, "and like a flute."

"And the food he reminds me of," finished Eddy, "is baked beans."

"Good," said Rose. "Now, Imogen. What flower is she like? Jack, you will tell us."

Jack looked suddenly like the nervous dog, and Rose handsomely started the portrait with, "Calla lily."

"That's it," Eddy agreed; "and the food she's like is cold lemon-shape, you know the stuff I mean; and her animal—there is no animal for Imogen; she is too loftily human."

"Her instrument is the organ," Rose finished, as if to end as handsomely as she had begun; "the organ playing the 'Pilgrims' March,' from Tannhaüser."

"Excellent," said Eddy.

These young people had done the portrait without help and after the slight pause with which their analogies were received Jack swiftly summed up Rose as, *pâté-de-foie-gras*; gardenia; a piano and a toy pomeranian.

"Thanks," Rose bowed; "I enjoy playing impudence to your dignity."

"What's Imogen up to just now?" Eddy asked, quite unruffled by Jack's reflections on his beloved. "When did you last see her, Jack?"

"I went down for a dress-rehearsal the day before yesterday." Jack had still the air of the nervous dog, walking with stiff legs and hair on end.

"Oh, the Cripple-Hellenic affair. How Imogen loves running a show."

"And how well she does it," said Rose. "What a perfect queen she would have made. She would have laid corner-stones, opened bazaars, visited hospitals and bowed so beautifully from a carriage, with such a sense of responsibility in the quality of her smile."

"How inane you are, Rose," said Jack. "Nothing less queen-like, in that decorative sense, than Imogen,

can be imagined. She works day and night for this thing in which you pretty young people get all the sixpences and she all the kicks. To bear the burden is all she does, or asks to do."

"Why, my dear Jack," Rose opened widely candid eyes, "queens have to work like fun, I can tell you. And who under the sun would think of kicking Imogen?"

"Besides," said Eddy, rising to saunter about the room, his hands in his pockets, "Imogen isn't so superhuman as your fond imagination paints her, my dear Jack. She knows that the most decorative rôle of all is just that—the weary, patient Atlas, bearing the happy world on his shoulders."

Mrs. Upton, in her corner of the sofa, had been turning the leaves of a rare old edition, glancing up quietly at the speakers while the innocent ripples slid on from the afternoon's first sunny shallows to these ambiguous depths. It was now in a voice that Jack had never heard from her before that she said, still continuing to turn, her eyes downcast: "How excessively unkind and untrue, Eddy."

If conscious of unkindness, Eddy, at all events, didn't resort to artifice as Rose (and Jack still smarted from it) had done. He continued to smile, taking up a small, milky vase to examine it, while he answered in his chill, cheerful tones, "Don't be up in arms, Mamma, because one of your swans gives the other a fraternal peck. Imogen and I always peck at each other; it's not behind her back alone that I do it. And I'm saying nothing nasty. It's only people like Imogen who get the good works of the world done at all. If they didn't love it just, if they didn't feel the delight in it that an artist feels in his work, or that Rose feels in dancing

better and looking prettier than any other girl in a ballroom, that any one feels in any self-realization, why the cripples would die off like anything."

"It's a very different order of self-realization," Mrs. Upton continued to turn her leaves.

Jack knew that she was deeply displeased, and mingled with his own baffled vexation was the relief of feeling himself at one with her, altogether at one, in opposition to this implied criticism of Imogen. Together they shared the conviction—was it the only one they shared about Imogen?—that she simply cared about being good more than about anything else in the world, together they recognized such a purpose and such a desire as lofty and ennobling.

The tone of her last remark had been final. The talk passed at once away from Imogen and turned on Jack's last acquisitions in white porcelain and on his last piece of work, just returned from a winter exhibition. Eddy went with him into the studio to see it, and Mrs. Upton and Rose were left alone. It was then that Mrs. Upton, touching the other's shoulder so that she looked up from the fur she was fastening, said, "You are not a nice little girl, Rose."

The "little girl" stared. Anything so suave yet so firmly intended as unpleasant had never been addressed to her. For once in her life she was at a loss, and after the stare she flushed scarlet, the tears rushing to her eyes.

"Oh, Mrs. Upton," she faltered, "what do you mean?"

"Hitting in the dark isn't a nice thing to do."

"Hitting in the dark?"

"Yes. You know quite well."

"Oh, but really, really, I didn't mean——" Rose

wailed. There was no escape from those clear eyes. They didn't look sad or angry ; they merely penetrated, spreading dismay within her.

Mrs. Upton now took the flushed face between her hands and gravely considered it. "*Didn't* you ?" she asked.

Rose could look back no longer. Before that gaze a sense of utter darkness descended upon her. She felt helplessly like a naughty cowering child. Her eyes dropped and the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Please, please, forgive me. I didn't dream you'd understand. I didn't mean anybody to understand, except, perhaps. Eddy. I don't know why, it's odious of me—but Imogen does irritate me, just a little, just because she is so good, you know, so lovely."

But this, too, Mrs. Upton penetrated. "Whether Imogen is so good and lovely that she irritates you is another matter. But, whatever you may think of her, don't,"—and here she paused a little over the proper expressing of Rose's misdeed—"don't call her a calla-lily," she found. And she finished, "Especially not before her mother, who is not so blind to your meaning as we must hope that Jack is."

Poor Rose looked now like the naughty child after a deserved chastisement.

"Oh, I am so miserable," this statement of smarting fact was all she found to say. "And I do care for you so. I would rather please you than any one. Can't you forgive me ?"

But at this point the darkness was lifted, for Mrs. Upton, smiling at last, put her arms around her, kissed her, and said : "Be a nice little girl."

CHAPTER XII

IMOGEN, during this fortnight of her mother's absence, had time to contemplate her impressions of change.

Their last little scene together had emphasized her consciousness of the many things that lay beneath it.

Her mother had felt that the tears on that occasion were in part a result of the day's earlier encounter, muffled though it was, over Sir Basil, and had attempted, on ground of her own choosing, to lure her child away from the seeing, not only of Sir Basil—he was a mere symbol—but of all the things where she must know that Imogen saw her as wrong.

"She wanted to blur my reason with instinct, to mesh me in the blind filial thing," Imogen reflected. In looking back she could feel with satisfaction that her reason had dominated the scene as a light-house beacon shines steadily over tossing and ambiguous waters. Satisfaction was in the vision, the deep content of having, as she would have expressed it, "Been true to her light." But it was only in this vision of her own stability of soul that satisfaction lay.

In Jack's absence, and in her mother's, she could gauge more accurately what her mother had done to Jack.

She had long felt it, that something different, growing vaguely in him, so vaguely that it was like nothing with a definite edge or shape, resembling, rather, a shadow of the encompassing gloom, a shadow that only her own far-reaching beams revealed. As the light hovers on the confines of the dark she had felt—a silence.

He was silent, he watched. That was the summing up of the change. He really seemed to convey to her through his silence that he understood her now, or was coming to understand her, better than ever before, better than she understood herself. And with the new understanding it was exactly as if he had found that his focus was misdirected. He no longer looked up, Imogen knew that by the fact that when, metaphorically, her eyes were cast down to meet with approbation and sweet encouragement his upturned admiration, vacancy, only, met their gaze. He no longer—so her beam pierced further and further—looked at her on a level, with the frankness of mere mutual need and trust. No, such silence, such watchfulness implied superiority. The last verge of shadow was reached when she could make out that he looked at her from an affectionate, a paternal—oh, yes, still a very lover-like—attitude, not less watchful for being tender, not less steady for being, still, rather puzzled. Beyond that she couldn't pierce. It was indeed a limit denoting a silent revolution in their relationship. When she came to the realization of it, Imogen, starting back, indignant through all her being, promised herself that if he looked down she, at all events, would never lend herself to the preposterous topsy-turveydom by, looking up. She would firmly ignore that shift of focus. She would look straight before her; she would

look, as she spoke, the truth. She followed her gleam. She stood beside her beacon. And she told herself that her truth, her holding to it, might cost her a great deal.

It was not that she feared to lose him—if she chose to keep him;—but it might be that there were terms on which she would not care to keep him. If—it was still an almost unimaginable "if"—he could not, would not come once more to see clearly, then, as lover, he must be put aside, and even as friend learn that she had small use for so warped a friendship.

Under this stoic resolve there was growing in poor Imogen a tossing of confused pain and alarm. She could see change so clearly, but causes were untraceable, an impalpable tangle.

Why was it so? What had happened? What, above all, had her mother done to Jack?

It was all about her mother that change centred, from her that it came. It was a web, a complexity of airy filaments that met her scrutiny. Here hovered her mother's smile, here her thoughtful, observant silences. There Sir Basil's letter, Felkin's departure, all the blurred medley of the times when she had talked to Jack and Mary and her mother had listened. A dimness, a haze, was over all, and she only escaped it, broke through it, when, fighting her way out to her own secure air and sunlight, she told herself, as, at all events, the nearest truth to hand, that it was about Jack, over him, that the web had been spun, the web of a smile that claimed nothing yet that chained men, the web of a vague, sweet silence, that judged nothing, yet softly blighted, through its own indifference, all other people's enthusiasms. And again and again, during these days of adjustment to the clear and the

confused vision, Imogen felt the salt hot tears burning in her throat and eyes.

When Jack and her mother were both back again and he and she united in the mechanical interests of the tableaux, now imminent, the strangest loneliness lay in the fact that she could no longer share her grief, her fear, her anger, with Jack. He was there, beside her, but he was far, far away, and she must control any impulse that would draw him near. She put him to the test ; she measured his worth by his power of recognition, his power of discrimination between her mother's instinctive allurements and her own high demand. But while with her mind and soul, as she told herself, she thus held him away, she was conscious of the inner wail of loneliness and unconscious that, under the steady resolution, every faculty, every charm she possessed was spinning and stretching itself out to surround and hold him.

She made no appeal, but he would feel her quiet sadness weigh upon him ; she made no reproach, but she knew that he could not but be full of pity for her weariness, of love for her devotedness, when her pale profile bent by lamp-light over all the tedious work of the tableaux ; knew that her patient, " Good-night, dear Jack—I'm too tired to stay and talk," must smite him with compunction and uneasiness.

It was no direct communication ; she used symbols to convey to him the significance that he seemed to be forgetting.

She took him to one of Miss Bocock's lectures, gently disowning praise for her part in their success. She took him to the hospital for cripple children, where the nurses smiled at her and the children clambered, crutches and all, into her lap—she knew how lovely

she must look, enfolding cripple children. She took both her mother and him to her Girls' Club on the East Side, where they saw her surrounded by adoring gratitude and enthusiasm, where she sat hand in hand with her "girls," all sympathy, all tenderness, all interest—all the things that Jack had loved her for and that he still, of course, loved her for. Here she must seem to him like a sister of charity, carrying high her lamp of love among these dark lives. And she was careful that their reflected light should shine back upon her. "I want you to know a dear friend of mine, Jack—Miss Mc'Ginty, and this, Evangeline, is my friend, Mr. Pennington," so she would lead him up to one of the girls, bold and gay of eye, highly decorated of person. She knew that she left her reputation in safe hands with Evangeline. "Are you a friend of Miss Upton's. She's *fine*. We're all just crazy about her." She had, as she went from them, the satisfaction of hearing so much of Evangeline's crude but sincere paeon; they were all "just crazy" about her.

And a further shining of light suggested itself to her.

"Mamma darling," she said, as they were going home in the clashing, clattering "elevated." "You mustn't think me naughty, but I had to ask them—my own particular girls—to go with us to the Philharmonic. They are becoming so interested in their music and it will be a treat for them, will really mean something in their lives, will really live for them, *in* them."

Mrs. Upton leaned forward to listen in the mingled uproar of banging doors and vociferous announcements from the conductor. A look of uncertainty crossed her

face and Imogen hastened to add: "No, it's not the extravagance you think. I had a splendid idea. I'm going to sell that old ring that Grandmamma Cray left me. Rose told me once that I could get a lot of money for it."

Swiftly flushing, her brows knitted, the din about them evidently adding to her perturbation, Mrs. Upton, with a sharpness of utterance that Jack had never heard from her, said: "Your sapphire ring? Your grandmother's ring? Indeed, indeed, Imogen, I must ask you not to do that."

"Why, Mamma dear, why?" Imogen's surprise was genuine and an answering severity was checked by Jack's presence.

"It was my mother's ring."

"But what better use could I make of it, Mamma? I rarely wear any ring but the beautiful pearl that Papa gave me."

"I couldn't bear to have you sell it."

"But Mamma dear, why? I must ask it. How can I sacrifice so much for a mere whim?"

"I must ask you to yield to a mere whim, then. Pray give up the thought. We will find the money in some other way."

"Of course, Mamma, if you insist, I must yield," Imogen said, sinking back in her seat beside the attentive Jack and hoping that her mournful acquiescence might show in its true light to him even if her mother's sentimental selfishness didn't. And later, when he very prettily insisted on himself entertaining the club-girls at the Philharmonic, she felt that, after all, no one but her mother had lost in the encounter. The girls were to have their concert (though they might have had many such, had not her mother so robbed

them, there was still that wound) and she was to keep her ring, and she was not sorry for that, for it did go well with the pearl. Above all Jack must have appreciated both her generous intention and her relinquishing of it.

Yet she had just to test his appreciation.

"Indeed I do accept, Jack. I can't bear to have them disappointed for a childish fancy, like that of poor Mamma's, and we have no right to afford it by any other means. Isn't it strange that any one should care more for a coloured bit of stone than for some high and shining hours in those girl's grey lives?"

But Jack said: "Oh, I perfectly understand what she felt about it. It was her mother's ring. She probably remembers seeing it on her mother's hand." So Imogen had, again, to recognize the edge of the shadow.

They all of them, Jack, Mary, and her mother, went with her and her girls to the concert. Jack had taken two boxes in the semi-circle that sweeps round Carnegie Hall, overhanging the level sea of heads below. Rose Packer, just come to town, was next them with the friends she was visiting in New York, two pretty, elaborately dressed girls, frothing with youthful high spirits and their mother, an abundant, skilfully girthed matron. The Langleys were very fashionable and very wealthy; their houses in America, England, Italy, their yachts and motor-cars, their dances and dinners, furnished matter for constant and uplifted discourse in the society columns of the English speaking press all over the world. Every one of Imogen's factory girls knew them by name and a stir of whispers and nudges announced their recognition.

Mrs. Langley leaned over the low partition to clasp

Mrs. Upton's hand, they had known each other since girlhood, and to smile benignly upon Imogen, casting a glance upon the self-conscious, staring girls, whose clothing was a travesty of her own consummate modishness as their manners at once attempted to echo her sweetness and suavity.

"What a nice idea," she murmured to Imogen, "and to have them hear it in the best way possible, too. Not crowded into cheap, stuffy seats."

"That would hardly have been possible, since I do not myself care to hear music in cheap seats. What is not good enough for me is not good enough for my friends. To-day we all owe our pleasure to Mr. Pennington."

Mrs. Langley, blandly approving, turned to Jack with questioning about the tableaux.

"We are all so much interested in Imogen's interests, aren't we? It's such an excellent idea. My girls are so sorry that they can't be in them. Rose tells me, Imogen, that there was some idea of your doing Antigone."

"None whatever," said Imogen, with no abatement of frigidity. She disapproved of leaders of fashion.

"I only meant," Rose leaned forward, "that we wanted you to so much."

"And can't you persuade her? You would look so well, my dear child. Talk her over, Valerie, you and Mr. Pennington." Mrs. Langley looked back at her friend.

"It would hardly do just now, I think," Valerie answered.

"But for a charity." Mrs. Langley urged her mitigation with a smile that expressed, to Imogen's

irritated sensibilities, all the trite conformity of the mammon-server.

"I don't think it would do," Valerie repeated.

"Pray don't think my motive in refusing a conventional one," said Imogen with an irrepressible severity that included her mother as well as Rose and Mrs. Langley. These two sank back in their seats and the symphony began.

Resting her cheek on her hand, her elbow on her knee, Imogen leaned forward, as if out of the perplexing, weary world into the sphere of the soul, She smiled deeply at one of her girls while she fell into the listening harmony of attitude, and her delicate face took on a look of rapt exaltation.

Jack was watching her, she knew, though she did not know that her own consciousness of the fact effectually prevented her from receiving as more than a blurred sensation the sounds that fell upon her ear.

She adjusted her face, her attitude, as a painter expresses an idea through the medium of form, and her idea was to look as though feeling the noblest things that one can feel. And at the end of the first movement, the vaguely heard harmony without responding to the harmony of this inner purpose, the music's tragic acceptance of doom echoing her own deep sense of loneliness, the strange new sorrow tangling her life, tears rose beautifully to her eyes, a tear slid down her cheek.

She put up her handkerchief quietly and dried it, glancing now at Jack beside her. He was making a neat entry in a notebook, technically interested in the new rendering by a new conductor. The sight struck through her and brought her soaring sadness to earth. Anger, deep and gnawing, filled her. He had

not seen her tears, or, if he had, did not care that she was sad. It was little consolation for her to see good Mary's eyes fixed on her with wide solicitude. She smiled, ever so gravely and tenderly, at Mary, and turned her eyes away.

A babble of silly enthusiasm had begun in the Langley's box, and Rose had just effected a change of seat that brought her next to her adored Mrs. Upton and nearer her dear Mary. Imogen almost felt that hostile forces had clustered behind her back, especially as Jack turned in his chair to talk to Mary and her mother.

"Just too lovely!" exclaimed one of the younger Miss Langleys, in much the same vernacular as that used by Imogen's *protégées*.

She looked round at these to see one yawning cavernously, on the cessation of uncomprehended sound, while another's eyes, drowsed as if by some narcotic, sought the relief of visual interest in the late-comers who filed in below. A third sat in an attitude of sodden preoccupation, breathing heavily and gazing at the Langleys and at Rose, who wore to-day a wonderful dress. Only a rounded little Jewess, with eyes of black lacquer set in a fat, aquiline face, quite Imogen's least favourite of her girls, showed a proper appreciation. She was as intent and as preoccupied as Jack had been.

The second movement began, a movement hurrying, dissatisfied, rising in appeal and aspiration, beaten back; turning upon itself continually, continually to rise again—baffled, frustrated, yet indomitable. And as Imogen listened her features took on a masklike look of gloom. How alone she was among them all.

She was glad, in the third movement, her mind, in

its knotted concentration, catching but one passage, and that given with a new rendering, to emphasize her displeasure by a little shudder and frown. An uproar of enthusiasm arose after the movement, and Imogen heard one of the factory girls behind her, in answer to a question from her mother, ejaculate "*Fine!*"

When her mother leaned to her with the same—"Wasn't it splendid?" Imogen found relief in answering firmly—"I thought it insolent."

"Insolent? That adagio bit?" Jack, evidently, had seen her symptoms of distress. "Why, I thought it a most exquisite interpretation."

"So did I," said Mrs. Upton rather sadly from behind.

"It hurt me, Mamma dear," said Imogen. "But then I know this symphony so well, love it so much, that I perhaps feel intolerantly towards new readings."

As the next and last movement began, she heard Rose, under her breath, yet quite loud enough, murmur, "Bunkum!"

The ejaculation was nicely modulated to reach her own ears alone. With a deepened sense of alienation, Imogen sat enveloped by the unheard thunders of the final movement. Yes, Rose would hide her impertinence from others' ears. Imogen had noted the growing tenderness, light and playful, between her mother and the girl. Behind her, presently, she rustled in all her silks as she leaned to whisper something to Mrs. Upton: "You will come and have tea with me—at Sherry's—all by ourselves?" Imogen caught.

Her mother was not the initiator, but her acquiescence was an offence, and to Imogen, acutely conscious of the whispered colloquy, each murmur ran needles of

anger into her stretched and vibrating nerves. At last she turned eyes portentously widened and a prolonged "Ssssh" upon them.

"People *oughtn't* to whisper," Jack smiled comprehendingly at her, when they reached the end of the symphony—the rest of the movement having been occupied, for Imogen, with a sense of indignant injury.

She had caught his attention then with her reproof. There was sudden balm in his sympathy. The memory of the unnoticed tear still rankled in her, but she was able to smile back. "Some people will always be the money-lenders in the temple."

At once the balm was embittered. She had trusted too much to his sympathy. He flushed his quick, facile flush, and she was again at the confines of the shadow. Really it was coming to a pass when she could venture no least criticism, even by implication, of her mother.

But, keeping up her smile, she went on: "You don't feel that? To me, music is a temple, the cathedral of my soul. And the chink of money, the bartering of social trivialities, jars on me like a sacrilege."

He looked away, still with the flush. "Aren't we all, more or less, worshippers or money-lenders by turn? My mind often strays."

"Not to the glitter of common coin," she insisted, urging, with mildness, his own better self upon him; for, yes, rather than judge her mother he would lower his own ideal. All the more reason then for her to hold fast to her own truth, and see its light place him where it must. If he now thought her priggish—well, that *did* place him.

"Oh, yes, it does, often," he rejoined; but now he

smiled at her as though her very solemnity, her very lack of humour, touched him; it was once more the looking down of the shifted focus. Then he appealed a little: "You mustn't be too hard on people for not feeling as you do—all the time."

Consistency did not permit her an answer, for the next piece had begun.

When the concert was over, Mrs. Langley offered the hospitality of her electric brougham to three of them. Rose and her girls were going to a tea close by. Imogen said that she preferred walking and Jack said that he would go with her; so Mary and Mrs. Upton departed with Mrs. Langley, and, the factory girls dispatched to their distances by the "elevated," the young couple started on their way down the crowded Fifth Avenue.

It was a bright, reverberating day, dry and cloudless, and, as they walked shoulder to shoulder, their heels rang metallically on the frosty pavements. Above the sloping cañon of the avenue, the sky stretched, a long strip of scintillating blue. The "Flat Iron" building towered appallingly into the middle-distance like the ship's prow of some giant invasion. The significance of the scene was of nothing nobly permanent, but it was exhilarating in its expression of inquisitive, adventurous life, shaping its facile ideas in vast, fluent forms.

Imogen's face, bathed in the late sunlight, showed its usual calm; inwardly she was drawn tight and tense as an arrow to the bow-head, in a tingling readiness to shoot far and free at any challenge.

A surface constraint was manifested in Jack's nervous features, but she guessed that his understanding had not reached the pitch of her own acuteness and

made him only aware of a difference as yet unadjusted between them. Indeed, with a quiet interest, that she knew was not assumed, he presently commented to her on the odd disproportion between the streaming humanity and its enormous frame.

"If one looks at it as a whole it's as inharmonious as a high, huge stage with its tiny figures before the footlights. It's quite out of scale as a setting for the human form. It's awfully ugly, and yet it's rather splendid too."

Imogen assented.

"We are still juggling with our possibilities," said Jack, and he continued to talk on of the American people and their possibilities, his favourite topic, so quietly, so happily even, that Imogen felt, suddenly, a relaxation of the miserable mood that had held her during all the afternoon. His comradely tone brought her the sensation of their old, their so recent, relation, complete, unflawed, once more. An impulse of recovery rose in her and, her mind busy with the sweet imagination, she said, presently, reflectively: "I think I will do your Antigone after all."

Completely without coquetry, and sincerely innocent of feminine wiles, Imogen had always known, subconsciously as it were, for the matter seldom assumed the least significance for her, that Jack delighted in her personal appearance. She saw herself, suddenly, in all the appealing youth and beauty of the Grecian heroine, stamping on his heart, by means of the outer manifestation, that inner reality to which he had become so strangely blind. It was to this revelation of reality that her thought clung, and an added impulse of mere tenderness had helped to bring the words to her lips. In her essential childish-

ness, where emotion and the drama of the senses were concerned, she could not have guessed that the impulse, with its tender mask, was the primitive one of conquest, the cruel female instinct for holding even where one might not care to keep. At the bottom of her heart, a realm never visited by her unspotted thoughts, was a yearning, strangely mingled, to be adored, and to be revenged on him for the faltering she had felt in his adoration. Ah, to bind him !—to bind him, helpless, to her ! That was the mingled cry.

Jack looked round at her, as unconscious as she of these pathetic and tigerish depths ; but though his eye lighted with the artist's delight in the vision that he had relinquished reluctantly, she saw, in another moment, that he hesitated.

" That would be splendid, dear. But can you go back on what you said ? "

" Why not ? If I have found reason to reconsider my first decision ? "

" What reason ? You mustn't do it just to please me, you know, though it's sweet of you, if that is the reason. Your mother, you see, agreed with you. I hadn't realized that she would mind. You know what she said, just now."

Jack had flushed in placing his objection and Imogen, keeping grave, sunlit eyes upon him, felt a flush rise to her own cheeks.

" Do you feel her minding, minding in such a way, any barrier ? " She was able to control the pain, the anger, that his hesitation gave her, the quick humiliation too, and she went on with only a deepening of voice : " Perhaps that minding of Mamma's is part of my reason. I have no right, I see that clearly now, to withhold what I can do for our cause from any selfish shrinking.

I felt, in that moment when she and Mrs. Langley debated on the conventional aspect of the matter, that I would be glad—yes, glad—to give myself, since my refusal is seen in the same category as any paltry, social scruple. It was as if a deep and sacred thing of one's heart were suddenly dragged out and exhibited like a thickness of black at the edge of one's note-paper. Will you understand me, Jack, when I say that I feel that I can in no way keep that sacred memory so safe as by making it this offering, of myself. It is for Papa that I shall do it. He would have wished it. I shall think of him as I stand there, of him and of the children that we are helping."

She spoke with her deliberate volubility, neither hesitating nor hurrying; her meaning, for all its grandiloquence of setting, very definite, and Jack looked a little dazed, as though from the super-abundance of meaning.

"Yes, I see. Yes, you are quite right," he said. He paused for a moment, going over her chain of cause and effect, seeking the particular link that the new loyalty in him had resented. And then, after the pause, finding it: "But I don't believe your mother meant it like that," he added.

His eyes met Imogen's as he said it, and he almost fancied that something swordlike clashed against his glance, something that she swiftly withdrew and sheathed. It was earnest gentleness alone that answered him.

"What do you think she did mean then, Jack? Please help me to see if I'm unfair. I only long to be perfectly fair. How can I do for her, unless I am?"

His smouldering resentment was quenched by a sense of compunction and a rising hope.

"That's dear of you, Imogen," he said. "You *are*, I think, unfair at times It's difficult to lay one's finger on it."

"But please *do* lay your finger on it—as heavily as you can, dear Jack."

"Well, the simile will do for my impression. The finger you lay on *her* is too heavy. You exaggerate things in her, over-emphasize things."

She was holding herself, forcing herself to look calmly at this road he pointed out to her, the only road, perhaps, that would lead her back to her old place with him. "Admirable things, you think, if one saw them truly?"

"I don't know about admirable, but warm, sweet; at the worst, harmless. I'm sure, to-day, that she only meant it for you, for what she felt must be your shrinking. Of course she had her sense of fitness, too, a fitness that we may, as you feel, overlook when we see the larger fitness. But her intention was perfectly—" he paused, seeking an expression for the intention and repeated, "Sweet, warm, harmless."

Imogen felt that she was holding herself as she had never held herself. "Don't you think I see all that, Jack?"

"Well, I only meant that I, since coming to know her, really know her, in Boston, see it most of all."

"And you can't see, too, how it must stab me to have Papa, Papa put, through her trivial words, into the category of black-edged paper?"

Her voice had now the note of tears.

"But, she *doesn't*," he protested.

"Can you deny that, for her, he counts for little more than the mere question of convention?"

Jack at this was, perforce, silent. No, he couldn't altogether deny it, and though it didn't seem to him a particularly relevant truth he could but own that, to Imogen, it might well appear, so. He did not answer her, and there the incident seemed to end. But it left them both with the sense of frustrated hope; and over and above that Jack had felt, sharper than ever before, the old shoot of weariness at "Papa" as the touchstone for such vexed questions.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. UPTON expressed no displeasure, although she could not control surprise, when she was informed of Imogen's change of decision, and Jack, watching her as usual, felt bound, after the little scene of her quiet acquiescence, to return with Imogen, for a moment, to the subject of their dispute. Imogen had asked him to help her to see, and however hopeless he might feel of any fundamental seeing on her part, he mustn't abandon hope while there was a stone unturned.

"That's what it really was," he said to her, "you *do* see, don't you?—to respond to whatever she felt you wanted."

Imogen stared a little. "About what are you talking, Jack?"

"Of your mother;—Antigone; the black edge. It wasn't the black edge."

She had understood in a moment and was all there, as fully equipped with forbearing opposition as ever.

"It wasn't *even* the black edge, you mean? Even that homage to his memory was unreal?"

"Of course not. I mean that she wanted to do what you wanted."

"And does she think, do you think, it's *that* I want—a suave adaptation to ideals she doesn't even understand? No doubt she attributes my change to girlish

vanity, the wish to shine among the others. If that was what I wanted, that would be what she would want, too."

"Aren't you getting away from the point a little?" he asked, baffled and confused, as he often was, by her measured decisiveness.

"It seems to me that I am *on* the point. The point is that she cared so little about *him*—in either way."

This was what he had forseen that she would think.

"The point is that she cares so much for you," he ventured his conviction, fixing his eyes, oddly deepened with this, his deepest appeal, upon her. But Imogen, as though it were a bait thrown out and powerless to allure, slid past it.

"To gain things we must *work* for them. It's not by merely caring, yielding, that one wins one's rights. Mamma is a very 'sweet, warm, harmless' person; I see that as well as you do, Jack."

So she put him in his place and he could only wonder if he had any right to feel so angry.

The preparations for the new tableau were at once begun, and a few days after their last uncomfortable encounter, Jack and Imogen were again together, in happier circumstances it seemed, for Imogen, standing in the library while her mother adjusted her folds and draperies, could but delight a lover's eye. Mary, also on view, in her handmaiden array—Mary's part was a small one in the picture of the restored Alcestis—sat gazing in admiration, and Jack walked about mother and daughter with suggestion and comment.

"It's perfect, quite perfect," he declared, "that warm, soft white; and you have done it most beautifully, Mrs. Upton. You are a wonderful *costumière*."

"Isn't my chlamys a darling?" said Valerie

happily from below, where she knelt to turn a hem.

"Mamma won't let us forget that chlamys," Imogen said, casting a look of amusement upon her mother. "She is so deliciously vain about it." Imogen was feeling a thrill of confidence and hope. Jack's eyes, as they rested upon her, had shown the fondest admiration. She was in the humour, so rare with her of late, of gaiety and light assurance. And she thirsted for words of praise and delight from Jack.

"No wonder that she is vain," Jack returned. "It has just the look of that heavenly garment that blows back from the Victory of Samothrace. The hair, too, with those fillets—you did that, I suppose, Mrs. Upton?"

"Yes, I did. I do think it's an achievement. It has the carven look that one wants. Imogen's hair lends itself wonderfully to those long, sweeping lines."

But Jack, once having looked his admiration for Imogen, seemed tactlessly bent on emphasizing his admiration for the mere craftswoman of the occasion.

"Well, it's as if you had formed the image into which I'm to blow the breath of life. I'm really uncertain, yet, as to the best attitude." Imogen was listening to this with some gravity of gaze. "Do take that last position we decided upon, Imogen. And do you, Mary, take the place of the faltering old Œdipus for a moment. Look down, Imogen, yes, a strong, brooding, tenderness of look."

"Ah, she gets it wonderfully," said Valerie, still at her hem.

"Not quite deep or still enough," Jack objected. "Stand back, Mary, please, while we work at the expression. No, that's not it yet."

"But it's lovely, so. You would have demanded

more depth from Antigone herself, Jack," Mrs. Upton protested.

" Jack is quite right, Mamma, pray don't laugh at his suggestions. I understand perfectly what he means." Imogen glanced at herself in the mirror with a grave effort to assume the expression demanded of her. " Is this better, Jack ? "

" Yes—no ; no, you can't get at all what I mean, the young man returned, so almost pettishly that Valerie glanced up at him with a quick flush.

Imogen's resentment, if she felt any, did not become apparent. She accepted condemnation with dignified patience.

" I'm afraid that is the best I can do now, though I'll try. Perhaps on the day of the actual performance it will come more deeply to me. There, Mamma darling, that will do ; it's quite right now. I can't put myself into it while you sew down there. I can hardly think that I'm brooding over my tragic father while I see your pins and needles. Now, Jack, is this better ? " With perfect composure she once more took the suggested attitude and expression.

Mrs. Upton, her dusky flush deepened, rose, stumbling a little from her long stooping and, steadying herself, with her hand on a table, looked at the new effort.

" No, it's worse. It's complacent—self-conscious," burst from Jack. " You look as if you were thinking far more about your own brooding than about your father. Antigone is self-forgetting ; absolutely self-forgetting." So his rising irritation found impulsive helpless expression. In the slight silence that followed his words he was aware of the discord that he had crashed into an apparent harmony. He glanced almost furtively at Mrs. Upton. Had she seen—did

she guess—the anger, for her, that had broken into these peevish words? She met his eyes with her penetrating depth of gaze and Imogen, turning to them, saw the interchange, saw Jack abashed and humble, not before her own forbearance but before her mother's wonder and severity.

Resentment had been in her, keen and sharp, from his first criticism, nay, from his first ignoring of her claim to praise; it rose now to a flood of righteous indignation. Sweeping round upon them in her white draperies, casting aside, as in a flash she saw it, petty subterfuge and petty fear, coldly, firmly she questioned him.

"I must ask you whether this is mere ill-temper, Jack, or whether you intentionally wish to wound me. Pray let me have the truth."

Speechless, confused, Jack gazed at her.

She went on, gaining as she spoke her usual relentless fluency.

"If you would rather that someone else did the Antigone, pray say so frankly. It will be a relief to me to give up my part. I am very tired. I have a great deal to do. You know why I took up the added burden. My motives make me quite indifferent to petty, personal considerations. All that, from the first, I have had in mind, was to help, to the best of my poor ability. Whom would you rather have? Rose? Mary?—Clara Bartlett? Why not Mamma? I will gladly help any one of them with all that I have learnt from you as to dress and pose. But I cannot, myself, go on with the part if such malignant dissatisfaction is to be wreaked upon me."

Jack felt his head rise at last from the submerging flood.

" But, Imogen, indeed, I do beg your pardon. It was odious of me to speak so. No one can do the part but you."

" Why say that, Jack, when you have just told me that I do it worse and worse ? "

" It was only a momentary impression. Really, I'm ashamed of myself."

" But it's your impression that is the standard in these tableaux. How can I do the part if I contradict your conception ? "

" You don't. I was in a bad temper."

" And why, may I ask, were you in a bad temper ? "

The gaze from her serene yet awful brows was bent upon him, but, under it, in a sudden reaction from its very serenity, its very awfulness, a firm determination rose in him to meet it. Turning very red but eyeing Imogen very straight ; " I thought you inconsiderate, ungrateful, to your mother, as you often are," he said.

For a long moment Imogen was silent, glancing presently at Mary, scarlet with dismay, her hastily adjusted eyeglasses in odd contrast to her classic draperies, and then turning her eyes upon her mother who, still standing near the table, was frowning and looking down.

" Well, Mamma dear," she asked, " what have you to say to this piece of information ? Have I, all unconsciously, been unkind ? Have I been ungrateful ? Do you share Jack's sense of injury ?

Mrs. Upton looked up as though from painful and puzzling reflection.

" My dear Imogen," she said, " I think that you and Jack are rather self-righteous young people, far too prone to discussing yourselves. I think that you were a little inconsiderate ; but Jack has no call to take up

my defence or to express any opinion as to our relations. Of course you will do the Antigone, and of course, when he recovers his temper—and I believe he has already—he will be very glad that you should. And now let's have no more of this foolish affair."

None of them had ever heard her make such a measured, and, as it were, such a considered speech before, and the unexpectedness of it so wrought upon them that it reduced not only Jack, but even the voluble Antigone to silence. But in Jack's silence was an odd satisfaction, even an elation. He didn't mind his own humiliation—that of an officious little boy put in a corner—one bit ; for there in the corner opposite, was Imogen, actually Imogen, and the sight of it gave him a shameful pleasure.

Meanwhile Mrs. Upton calmly resumed her work at the hem, finished it, turned her daughter about and pronounced it all quite right.

" Now get into warmer clothes and come down to tea, which will be here directly," she said.

Imogen, by now, was recovered from the torpor of her astonishment. " Mary, will you come with me, I'll want your help." And then, as Mary, whom alone she could count as an ally joined her, she paused before departure, gathering her chlamys about her. " If I am silent, Mamma, pray don't imagine that it is you who have silenced me," she said. " I certainly could not think of defending myself to you. My character, with all its many faults, speaks for itself with those who understand me and what I aim at. All I ask of you, Mamma, is not to imagine, for a moment, that you are one of those."

So Antigone, white, smiling, wrathful, swept away, Mary behind her, round-eyed and aghast, and Valerie

was left confronting the overwhelmed Jack. He could find not one word to say, and for some moments Valerie, too, stood silent, slipping her needle back and forth in her fingers and looking hard at the carpet.

"It's all my fault!" Jack burst out suddenly. "Blundering, silly fool that I am! Do say that you forgive me."

She did not look at him, but, still slipping her needle with the minute, monotonous gesture back and forth, she nodded.

"But say it," Jack protested. "Scold me as much as you please. It's all true; I'm a prig, I know. But say that you forgive me."

A smile quivered on her cheek and, putting out her hand, she answered, "There's nothing to forgive, Jack. I lost my temper, too, and it's all mere nonsense."

He seized her hand, and then, only then, realized from something in the quiver of the smile, something muffled in the lightness of her voice, that she was crying.

"Oh!" broke from him, "Oh! what brutes we are!"

She had drawn her hand from his in a moment, had turned from him while she swiftly put her handkerchief to her eyes and, after the passage of the scudding rain-cloud, she confronted him clearly once more.

"Why, it's all my fault, don't you understand, from the beginning," she said.

He understood her perfectly. She had never been so near him.

"You *know* that's not true," he said. And then, at last, his eyes, widely upon her, told her on which side his sympathies were enlisted in the long-drawn

contest between—not between poor Imogen and herself, that was a mere result—but between herself and her husband.

And that she understood his understanding became at once apparent to him. He had never seen her blush as she blushed then and, when the deep glow had passed, she became very white and looked very weary, almost old.

"No, I don't know it, Jack," she said. "And you, certainly, do not. And now, dear Jack, don't let us speak of this any more. Will you help me to clear this table for the tea-things."

* * * * *

So this, for Imogen, was the result of her loving impulse during the frosty walk down Fifth Avenue. All her sweet, wordless appeals had been in vain. Jack had admired her as he might have admired a marionette, her beauty had meant less to him than her mother's dressmaking, and as she sat alone in her room on that afternoon, having gently and firmly sent Mary down to tea with the ominous message that she cared for none, she saw that the shadow between her and Jack loomed close upon them now, the shadow that might blot out all their future as a future they could share. And Imogen was frightened, badly frightened, at the prospect of that empty future.

Her fragrant branch of life that had bloomed so fully and freshly in her hand, a sceptre and a fairy wand of beneficence, had withered to a thorny scourge for her own shoulders. She looked about her, before her. She realized with a new, a cutting keenness, that Jack was very rich and she very poor. The chill of poverty had hardly reached her as yet, the warm certainty of its cessation had wrapped her round too

closely ; but it reached her now, and the thought of that poverty, unrelieved, perhaps, for all her life, the thought of the comparative obscurity to which it would consign her, filled her with a real panic ; and, as before, the worst part of the panic was that she should feel it, she, the scorner of material things. Suppose, just suppose, that no one else came. Everything grew grey at the thought. Charities, friends, admiration, these were poor substitutes for the happy power and pride that, as a rich man's wife, would have been hers. And the fact that had transformed her blossoming branch into the thorny scourge was that Jack's adored wife she would never be. His humbled, his submissive, his chastened and penitent wife—yes, on those terms, yes, she could see it, the future, like a sunny garden which one could only reach by squeezing oneself through some painfully narrow aperture. The fountains, the flowers, the lawns were still hers—if she would stoop and crawl ; and for Imogen the mere imagining of herself in such a posture brought a hot blush to her forehead. Not only would she have scorned such means of reaching the life of ample ease and rich benevolence, but they were impossible to her nature. A garden that one must crouch to enter was a prison. Better, far better, her barren, dusty, lonely life than such humiliation ; such apostasy.

She faced it all often, the future, the panic, during the last days of preparation for the tableaux, days during which, with a still magnanimity, she fulfilled the tasks that she had undertaken. She would not throw up her part because her mother and Jack had so cruelly injured her ; it was now for her father and for the crippled children alone that she did it.

Sitting in her bedroom, with its many books and

photographs, the big framed one of her father over her bed, she promised him, her eyes on his, that she would have strength to face it all, for all her life if necessary. "It was too easy, I see that now," she whispered to him. "I had made no real sacrifices for *our* thing. The drop of black blood had never yet been crushed out of my heart, for when you died it was submission that was asked of me, not sacrifice. It was easy, dear, to give myself to the work we believed in; to be tired, and strong and glad for it; to live out bravely into the world, when you were beside me and when all the means of work were in my hand. But now I must relinquish something that I could only keep by being false to myself—to you—to the right. And I must go uphill—yes, uphill to the very end—accepting poverty, loneliness, the great need of love, unanswered. But I won't falter or forget, darling father. As long as I live I will fight our fight. Even if the way is through great darkness, I carry the light in my heart."

The noble pathos of such soliloquies brought her to tears, but the tears, she felt, were strengthening and purifying. After drying them, after reading some of the deeply marked passages in the poets that he and she—and, oh alas! alas! she and Jack, lost Jack—had so often read together, she would go downstairs, descend into the dusty, thorny arena again, feeling herself uplifted, feeling a halo of sorrowful benignity about her head. And this feeling was so assured that those who saw her at these moments were forced, to some extent, to share it.

Towards her mother, towards Jack, she showed a gentle, a distant courtesy; to Mary a heart-breaking sweetness. Mary, perhaps, needed to have pettier

impressions effaced, and certain memories could not but fade before Imogen's august head and unfaltering eyes.

If she had been wrong in that strange little scene of the Antigone, Mary was convinced that her intention had been high. Jack had hurt her too much: that was it; and, besides, how could she know what had gone on behind the scenes, passages between mother and daughter that had made Imogen's attitude inevitable. So Mary argued with herself, sadly troubled.

"Oh, Imogen, please tell me," she burst forth one day, the day before the tableaux, when she was sitting with Imogen in the latter's room, "what is it that makes you so sad? Why are you so displeased with Jack? You haven't given him up, Imogen!"

Imogen passed her hand softly over Mary's hair, recalling, as she did so, that the gesture was a favourite one with her father.

"Won't you, can't you tell me?" Mary pleaded.

"It is so difficult, dear. Given him up? No, I never do that with people I have cared for; but he is no longer the Jack I cared for. He is changed, Mary."

"He adores you as much as ever—of course, I've always known how he adored you; it made me so happy, loving you both as I do; and he still adores you, I'm sure. He is always watching you. He changes colour when you come into the room."

"He, too, knows and feels what ominous destinies are hanging over us, Mary."—The deeply marked passages had been in Maeterlinck that day.—"We are parted, perhaps for ever, because he sees at last that I will not stoop. When one has grown up, all one's life, straight, facing the sunrise, one cannot bend and look down."

"*You* stoop! Why it's that that he would never let you do!"

"No? You think that, after the other day? *He* has stooped, Mary, to other levels. He breathes a different air from mine now. I cannot follow him into his new world."

"You mean?—you mean?——" Mary faltered.

Imogen's clear eyes told her what she meant; it did not need the slow acquiescence of her head nor the articulated: "Yes, I mean Mamma—poor Mamma. A little person can make great sorrows, Mary."

But now Mary's good, limpid eyes, unfaltering and candid as a child's, dwelt on her with a new hope. "But, Imogen, it's just that; *is* she so little? She isn't like you, of course. She can't lift and sustain, as you can. She doesn't stand for great things, as you do and as your father did. But I seem to feel more and more how much she could be to you. It only needs—more *understanding*; and, if that's all, I really believe, Imogen darling, that you and Jack will be all right again. Perhaps," Mary went on with a terrible unconsciousness—"perhaps he has come to understand, already, better than you do. I thought that, really, the other day—and it's that that makes the sense of division. You are at different places of understanding. And he hasn't to remember, and get over, all the mistakes, the faults in her past, and perhaps it's because of that that he sees the present reality more clearly than you do. Jack is such a wonderful person for seeing the *real* self of people."

Imogen's steady gaze during this speech continued to rest unwaveringly upon her; Mary felt no warning

in it and, when she had done, waited eagerly for some echo to her faith.

But when Imogen spoke, it was in a voice that revealed to her her profound miscalculation.

"*You* do not understand, Mary. *You* see nothing. Her present self is her past self, unashamed unchanged, unatoned for. It is her mistakes, her faults, that Jack now stands for. It is her mistakes and faults that *I* must stand for, if I am to be beside him again. That would be the stooping that I meant. I fear that not only Jack, but you, are blinded, Mary. I fear that it is not only Jack, but you, that she is taking from me."

Her voice was calm, but the steely edge of an accusation was in it. Mary sat aghast. "Taking me from you! Oh, Imogen, you don't mean that you won't care for me if I get fond of her!"

The crudely simple interpretation brought the blood to Imogen's cheeks. "I mean that you can hardly be fond of us both. It is not *I* who will cease to care." Under the accusation was now an added note of pain and of appeal. All Mary's faiths rallied to that appeal.

"Imogen!" she said, timidly, like the wrong-doer she felt herself to be, taking the other's hand; "dear, brave, wonderful Imogen—how *can* you—how *can* you say it? Why there is hardly any one in the world who has counted to me as you have. Why, your mother is like a sweet child beside you. She hasn't faiths; she hasn't that healing, strengthening power that I've always so felt in you. She could never *mean* what you do. Oh! Imogen, you won't think such dreadful things, will you? You do forgive me if I have blundered and hurt you?"

Imogen drew in the fragrant incense with long

breaths—it revived her, filled her veins with new, courage, new hope. The two girls kissed solemnly. They were going out together and they presently went downstairs hand in hand. But, as an after-flavour, there lingered for Imogen, like a faint, flat bitterness after the incense, a suspicion that Mary, in wafting her censer with such energy, had been seeking to fill her own nostrils also with the sacred old aroma, to find as well as give the intoxication of faith.

CHAPTER XIV

"SIR BASIL!" Valerie exclaimed.

She rose from the tea-table, where she and Jack and Mrs. Wake were sitting, to meet the unexpected new-comer.

A gladness that Jack had never seen in her seemed to inundate her face, her figure, her outstretched hands; she looked young, she looked almost childlike, as she smiled at her friend over their clasp, and Jack saw by the light of that transfiguration how grey these last months must have been to her, how strangely bereft of response and admiration, how wanting in savour or sweetness. He saw, and with the insight came a sharp stir of bitterness against the new-comer, who threw them all like this into a dull background, and, at the same time, a real echo of her gladness, that she should have it.

He actually, in the sharp, swift twist of feeling, hardly remembered Imogen's forecasts and warnings, hardly remembered that Mrs. Upton's gladness and Sir Basil's beaming gaze put Imogen quite dreadfully in the right. He didn't think of Imogen at all, nor of the desecration of the house of mourning by this gladness, so absorbed was he in watching it, in sharing it, and in being hurt by it.

"Mrs. Wake, of course, is an old friend," Valerie said, leading Sir Basil up to the tea-table; "and here

is a new one—Jack Pennington, whom you must quite know already, I've written so much about him. Sit down, here. Tell me all about everything. Why this sudden appearance? Why no hint of it? Is it meant as a surprise for us?"

"Well, Frances and Tom were coming over, you knew that——?"

"Of course. I wrote Frances a steamer letter the day before yesterday. You got in this morning with them then? They said not a word of your coming when I last heard from them."

"I only decided to join them at the last minute. I thought that it would be good fun to drop upon you like this, so I didn't write. It *is* good to see you again." Sir Basil, while his beam seemed to include the room and its inmates, included them unseeingly; he had eyes, it was evident, only for her. He went on to give her messages from the Pakenhams, in New York but for a week on their way to Canada and eager to see her at once. They would have come with him had they not been rather knocked up by the early rise on the steamer and by the long wait at the custom-house.

"You must all come with me to-morrow to our tableaux," said Valerie. "Imogen is in them. She's out this afternoon, so you will see her for the first time at her loveliest. She is to be Antigone."

"Oh, so I shan't see her till to-morrow. I've always been a bit afraid of Miss Upton, you know," said Sir Basil, with a smile at Jack.

"Well, the first impression will be a reassuring one," said Valerie. "Antigone is the least alarming of heroines."

"I don't know about that," Sir Basil objected,

folding a slice of bread and butter. "A bit gruesome, don't you think?"

"Gruesome?"

"She stuck so to her own ideas, didn't she? Awfully rough on the poor fellow who wanted to marry her, insisting like that on burying her brothers."

Valerie laughed. "Well, but that sense of duty is hardly gruesome; it would have been horridly gruesome to have left her brothers unburied."

"You'll worse me in an argument, of course," Sir Basil replied, looking fondly at her; "but I maintain that she's a dreary young lady. Of course, I don't mean to say that she wasn't an exceedingly good girl, and all that sort of thing, but a bit of a prig, you must allow."

Jack listened to the bantering colloquy. This man, so hard, yet so kindly, so innocent, yet so mature, was making him feel by every tone, gesture, glance, oddly boyish and unformed. He was quite sure that he himself was a great deal cleverer, a great deal more conscious than Sir Basil; but these advantages somehow assumed the aspect of schoolboy badges of good conduct beside a grown-up standard. And, as he listened, he began to understand, far more deeply, all sorts of things about Valerie, to see what vacancies she had had to put up with, to see what fullness she must have missed. And he began to understand what Imogen, Cassandra-like, had declared, that the unseasonable fragrance of devotions hovered about her widowed mother: to remember the ominous, "Wait and see."

It showed how far he had travelled when he could recall these words with impatience, could answer them with: "Well, what of it? Doesn't she deserve some compensation?"—could quietly place Sir Basil as a

no longer hopeless adorer, and feel a thrill of satisfaction in so placing him.

Yes, sitting there in the house of mourning he could think these things.

But if he was so wide, so tolerant, the very expansion of his sympathies brought them a finer sensitiveness. Only a tendril-like fineness could penetrate the complexities of that deeper vision. He began to think of Imogen, and with a new pity, a new tenderness. How she would be hurt, and how, more than all, she would be hurt by seeing that he, while understanding, while sympathizing, should, helplessly, inevitably, be glad that Sir Basil had come. Poor Imogen, and poor himself; for where did he stand among all these shiftings of the scene? He, too, knew the drifting loneliness and desolation, and, though his heart ached for the old nearness, he could not put out his hand to her nor take a step towards her. In himself, in her, was the change, or the mere fate, that held them parted. The wrench had come slowly upon them, but, while he ached with the pain of it, he could already look upon it as accomplished. Only one question remained to be asked: Would nothing, no change, no fate, draw them again together?

For all answer a deep, settled sadness descended upon him.

Sir Basil took himself off before Mrs. Wake seemed to think it tactful to depart and, since, soon after, she too went, Jack and Valerie were left alone together.

She turned her bright, soft eyes upon the young man and he recognized in them the unseeing quality that he had found in Sir Basil's: that happy preoccupation with inner gladness. She made him think of the bird alighted to sing on the swaying blade, and she made

him think of a fountain released from winter and springing through sunlight in a murmur and sparkle of ecstasy. She was young, very young; he almost felt her as young in her gladness as he in his loneliness and pain. Smiling a trifle nervously, he said that he was glad, at last, to see something of her old life: "Of your real life," he added.

"My real life?" she repeated, and her look became more aware of him.

"Yes. Of course, in a sense, all this is something outlived, cast aside, for you. You've only taken it up for a bit while you felt that it had a claim upon you; but, once you have settled things, you would—you would leave us, of course," said Jack, still smiling.

She was thinking of him now, no longer of herself and of Sir Basil, and perhaps as she looked at him, at the thin, brown face, the light, deep eyes, she guessed at a stir of tears under the smile It was then as if the fountain sank from its own happy solitude and became a running brook of sweetness, sad yet merry. She didn't contradict him. She was sorry that she couldn't, yet glad that his statement should be so obviously true.

"You mean that I'll go back to my little Surrey cottage, when I settle things?" she said. "Perhaps, yes. And you will miss me? I shall miss you too, dear Jack. But we will often see each other. And then it may take a long time to settle all you young people."

Her confidence so startled him, so touched him with pity for its blindness, that, swiftly, he took refuge, in ambiguity.

"Oh, you'll settle us!" he said, wondering in what that settling would consist, wondering what would happen if Imogen, definitely casting him off—to put

final settling in that form—were left on her mother's hands. She would have to settle Imogen in America, and what, in the meanwhile, would become of her "real" life?

But from the mother's confidence, her radiance, that accepted his speech in its happiest meaning, he guessed that she didn't foresee such a contingency; he even guessed that, were she brought face to face with it, she wouldn't accept its unsettling of her own joy as final. The fountain was too strong to heed such obstacles. It would find its way to the sunlight. Imogen, in time, would have to accept a step-father.

CHAPTER XV

JACK did not witness the revelation to Imogen of the ominous arrival, but from her demeanour at lunch next day he could guess at how it had impressed her. He felt in her an intense, a guarded excitement, and knew that the news had fallen upon her with a tingling concussion. The sound of the thunder-bolt must reverberate all the louder in Imogen's ears from her consciousness that to Mary's it was soundless—Mary, who had been the only spectator of its falling. Her mother, too, was unconscious of such reverberations, so that it must seem to her a ghost-like subjective warning, putting all her old hauntings into audible form.

Jack felt that she at once sought evidences of the same experience in him, and all through the early lunch, where they assembled prior to his departure with the two girls for the theatre, he avoided meeting Imogen's eyes. He was too sure that she felt their mutual knowledge as a bond over the recent chasm. The knowledge in his own eyes was far too deep for him to allow her to wade into it; she would simply drown. He was rather ashamed of himself, but he resolutely feigned a cheerful unconsciousness.

"You are going with your friends, later?" he asked Valerie, who, he was quite sure, also feigning something, said that since Imogen and Mary dressed each other so well, and since he would be there to see that every

detail was right, she, with the Pakenhams and Sir Basil, would get her impression from the stalls. Afterwards they would all meet, here, for tea.

"It was a surprise, you know, their coming," Imogen put in suddenly from her end of the table, fixing strangely sparkling eyes upon Jack.

"No," said her mother, in tones of leisurely correction; "I expected the Pakenhams, as I told you."

"Oh yes; it was only Sir Basil's surprise. You didn't expect him. Does he like playing surprises on people, Mamma?"

"I don't know that he does."

"He only plays them on you?"

"I knew that he was coming, at some time."

"Ah, but you didn't tell me that; it was, in the main, *my* surprise then; but not so soon, I suppose?"

"So soon? So soon for what?"

Imogen, at this, allowed her badly adjusted mask of lightness to fall, and a sudden solemnity overspread her features.

"Don't you feel it rather soon for friends to play pranks, Mamma?"

The words seemed to erect a catafalque before their eyes, but, facing the nodding blackness with a calm in which Jack detected the glint of steel, Valerie answered: "I am not aware that they have been playing pranks."

For all the way to the theatre Imogen again assumed the mask, talking exclusively to Mary. She talked of these friends of her mother's, of Sir Basil, Mr. and Mrs. Pakenham, what she had heard of them, holding up, as if for poor, frightened Mary's delectation, an impartial, gaily sketched little portrait of their oddities. It was as if she felt it her duty to atone to Mary by her lightness and gaiety for the gloom that had overspread the

lunch ; as if she wished to assure Mary that she wouldn't allow her to suffer for other people's ill-temper—Mrs. Upton had certainly been very silent for the rest of that uncomfortable meal—as if it were for Mary's sake that she were assuming the mask, behind which, as Jack must know, she was in torture.

"I'm glad you're to see them, Mary darling ; they will amuse you. From your standpoint of reality, the standpoint of Puritan civilization—the deepest civilization the world has yet produced, the civilization that judges by the soul—you will be able to judge and place them as few of our people are as yet developed enough to do. They are of that funny English type, Mary, the leisured ; their business in life that of pleasure-seeking, their social service consisting in benevolent domination over the servile classes beneath them. Oh, they have their political business, too—we mustn't be unfair—though that consists, in the main, for people of their type, in maintaining their own place as donors and in keeping other people in the place of recipients. In their own eyes, I'm quite sure, they are useful, as upholding the structure of English civilization. You'll find them absolutely simple, absolutely self-assured, absolutely indifferent ; quite charming—there's no reason why they shouldn't be ; but their good manners are for themselves, not for you ; one must never forget that with the English. Do study them, Mary. We need to keep the fact of them clearly before us, for what they represent is a menace to us and to what we mean. I sometimes think that the future of the world depends upon which ideal is to win, ours or the English. We must arm ourselves with complete comprehension. Already they have infected the cruder types among us."

These were all sentiments that in the past Mary

felt sure Jack must have acquiesced in and approved of, and yet she felt surer that Imogen's manner of enunciating them was making Jack very angry. She herself did not find them as inspiring as she might have expected, and, looking very much frightened and flurried, she murmured that as she was to go back to Boston next day she would not have much opportunity for all this observation. "Besides, I don't believe that I'm so—so wise, so civilized, you know, as to be able to see it all."

"Oh, Imogen will tell you what to see," said Jack.

"It's very kind of her, I'm sure," poor Mary faltered. She could have burst into tears. These two!—these beloved two!

Meanwhile, at a little later hour, Valerie and Mrs. Wake made their way to the theatre, there to meet the group of friends from whom they had parted in England six months before.

The Pakenhams, full of question and comment, were intelligently massing well-assorted impressions of the country that was new to them. Sir Basil, though cheerfully pleased with all to which his attention was drawn, showed no particular interest in his surroundings. His concentration was entirely for his regained friend.

After her welcoming radiance of the day before, Valerie looked pale and weary, and when, with solicitude, he asked her whether she were not tired, she confessed to having slept badly.

"She's changed, you know," Sir Basil said to Mrs. Pakenham, when they were settled in their seats and Valerie, beside him, was engaged in pointing out people to Tom Pakenham. "It's been frightfully hard on her, all this, I'm sure."

"She's as charming as ever," said Mrs. Pakenham.

"Oh, well, that could never change. But what a shame that she should have had, all along, such a lot to go through." Sir Basil, as a matter of course, had the deepest antipathy for the late Mr. Upton.

The tableaux struck at once the note of success. Saved by Jack's skill from any hint of waxwork or pantomime, their subtle colour and tranquil light made each picture a vision of past time, an evocation of Hellenic beauty and dignity.

Cassandra in her car, her face—oh, artful Jack!—turned away, awful before the door of Agamemnon; Iphigenia, sleeping, on her way to the sacrifice; Helen before her husband and Hecuba; Alcestis returning from the grave, and Deianira with the robe. The old world of beauty and sorrow, austere and lovely in its doom, passed before modern eyes against its background of sky, grove and palace steps.

"And now," said Valerie, when the lights sprang out for the interval—"now for your introduction to Imogen. They have made her the climax, you see."

"He did, you mean—the young man?"

"Yes, Jack arranged it all."

"He's the one you wrote of, of course, who admires her so tremendously?"

"He is the one."

"In fact he'll carry her off from you some day, soon, eh?" Sir Basil ventured, with satisfaction in his own assurance. He, too, felt that Imogen must be "settled."

"I suppose so," said Valerie. "I couldn't trust her to any one more happily. He understands her and cares for her absolutely."

Sir Basil at this ventured a little further, voicing both satisfaction and anxiety with: "So, then, you'll come back—to—to Surrey?"

"Yes, then, I think, I can come back to Surrey," Valerie replied.

The heart of her feeling had always remained for him a mystery, and her acquiescence now might mean a great deal, everything in fact, or it might mean only her gliding composure before a situation that she had power to form as she would. He could observe that her colour rose. He knew that she blushed easily. He knew, too, that his own feeling was not hidden from her, and that the blush might only be the result of her recognizing it, yet he was occupied with the most hopeful interpretations when the curtain rose. A moment after its rising Valerie heard him softly ejaculate, "I say!"

She could have echoed the helpless rudimentary phrase. She, too, gazed in a stupor of delight and with a primitive emotion. The white creature, standing there before them, with her forward poise, her downcast yet upgazing face, was her child. Valerie, since her return to her home, had given little time to analysis of her own feeling: the stress of her situation had been too intense for leisurely self-observation. But, in the upwelling of a strange, a selfless joy, she knew now how often she had feared that all the joy of maternity was dead in her—killed, killed by Imogen. The joy now was a passing ray. The happy confusion of admiration, wonder and pride was blotted out by the falling gloom of reality It was her child who stood there, yet the bond between them seemed, but for the ache of rejected maternity at her heart, merely pictorial. Tears of bitterness filled her eyes involuntarily as she looked, and Imogen's form seemed to waver in a dim, an alien atmosphere.

When the curtain fell on the Antigone, who kept her pose without a tremor, the uproar of applause

was so great that it had to rise, not only twice, but three times. At the last a faint wavering shook slightly the Antigone's sculptured stillness and poor old Œdipus rocked obviously upon his feet.

"What a shame to make her keep it up for so long!" murmured Sir Basil, his face suffused with sympathy. The symptom of human weakness was a final touch to the enchantment.

"Well, it makes one selfish, such loveliness!" said Mrs. Pakenham, flushed with her clapping "Valerie, dear, she is quite too lovely!"

"Extraordinarily Greek, the whole thing" said Tom Pakenham; "the comparative insignificance of facial expression and the immense significance of attitude and outline."

"But the face!" Sir Basil turned an unseeing eye upon him, still wrapped, it was evident, in the vision that, at last, had disappeared; "the figure is perfect; but the face—I never saw anything so heavenly."

Indeed, in its downcast pose the slightly trivial lines of Imogen's nose and chin had been lost; the up-gazing eyes, the sweep of brow and hair, had dominated and transfigured her somewhat tamely perfect countenance.

"Do you know, I'm more afraid of her than ever," said Sir Basil to Valerie on their way home to tea, in the cab. "I wasn't really afraid before. I could have borne up very well; but now—it's like knowing that one is to have tea with a seraph."

Jack, Imogen and Mary were not yet arrived when they reached the house; but by the time the tea was in the table and Valerie in her place behind the urn, they heard the cab drive up and the feet of the young people on the stairs.

Jack entered alone, saying that Mary and Imogen were gone to take off their wraps. Yes, he assured Valerie, they had promised to keep on their Grecian robes for tea.

Valerie introduced him to the Pakenhams and led the congratulations on his triumph. "For it really is yours, Jack, as much as if you had painted the whole series of pictures."

Jack, looking shy, turned from one to the other as they seconded her enthusiasm, Mrs. Pakenham, with her elaborately formal head and china-blue eyes; her husband, robust and heavy; Sir Basil, still with his benignant, unseeing quality. Among them all, in spite of Mrs. Wake's keen, familiar visage, in spite of Valerie's soft glow, he felt himself a stranger. He even felt, with a little stab of ill-temper, that there had been truth in Imogen's diagnosis. They were kindly, but they were tremendously indifferent. They didn't at all expect you to be interested in them; but that hardly atoned for the fact that they weren't interested in you. For Jack, life was made up of vigilant, unceasing interest in himself and in everybody else.

"Ah, were they all taken from your pictures?" Sir Basil asked him, strolling up to the mantelpiece to examine a photograph of Imogen that stood there.

Jack explained that he could claim no such gallery of achievement. He had made a few sketches for each tableau; his work had been, in the main, that of stage-manager.

"Oh, I see," said Sir Basil, not at all abashed by his blunder. "Nicer than lay figures to work with, eh, all those pretty young women?"

"I don't use lay-figures, at any time. I'm a landscape painter," Jack explained, somewhat stiffly.

He surmised that had he been introduced as Velasquez Sir Basil would have been quite as unmoved, just as he would have been quite as genially inclined had he been introduced as a scene-painter.

"I used to think I'd go in for something of that sort in my young days," said Sir Basil, holding Imogen's photograph; "and I dabbled a bit in water colour for a time. Do you remember that little sketch of the Priory, done from the beech avenue, Mrs. Upton? Not so bad, was it?"

"Not at all bad," said Valerie; "but we can't use such negatives for Jack's work. It's very seriously good, you know. It's anything but dabbling."

"Oh, yes; I know that you are a real artist." Sir Basil smiled at Jack from the photograph. "This doesn't do her justice, does it?"

"Imogen? No; it's a frightful thing," said Jack over-emphatically.

Mrs. Pakenham asked to see it and pronounced that, for her part, she thought it excellent.

"You ought to paint her portrait," Sir Basil continued, looking at Jack, who had once more to explain that landscape was his only subject. He guessed from the something at once benign and faintly quizzical in Sir Basil's regard, that to all these people he was significant, in the main, as Imogen's lover, and the intuition vexed him still further.

Imogen's entrance, startling in its splendid incongruity, put an end to his self-consciousness and absorbed him in contemplation.

Imogen revealed herself newly, even to him, to-day. It wasn't the old Imogen of stateliness, graciousness, placidity, nor the later one of gloom and anger. This Imogen, lovely, with her flushed cheeks and spark-

ling eyes, was deeply excited, deeply self-forgetful. She, too, was absorbed in her intense curiosity, her feverish watchfulness.

She said nothing while her mother introduced her to the newcomers, who all looked a little taken aback, as though the resuscitated Grecian heroine were indeed among them, and stood silently alert near the tea-table, handing the cups of tea, the cakes and scones, for Jack and Sir Basil to pass round. Her arms were bare and her slender bare feet, laced with gold-clasped fastenings, showed on her white sandals. Jack saw that Sir Basil's eyes were fixed on her with an expression of wonder.

He asked her as he took the last cup from her, if she were not cold, and, gentle, though unsmiling, Imogen replied, "Oh, no," glancing at the roaring wood fire that illuminated her whiteness as if with a sacrificial glow.

"Do sit down and have your tea, Imogen. You must be very tired," her mother said, with something of the chill that the scene at the lunch table had diffused still in her voice.

"Not very, thanks, Mamma dear," said Imogen; and, more incongruous in loveliness than before, she sat down in a high backed chair at some little distance from the tea-table. Sir Basil, as if with a sort of helplessness, remained beside her.

"Yes, it was a great success, wasn't it," Jack heard her replying presently, while she drank the tea with which Sir Basil had eagerly supplied her. "I'm so glad."

"You liked doing it, didn't you. You couldn't have done it, like that—looked like that, if you hadn't cared a lot about it," Sir Basil pursued.

Imogen smiled a little and said that she didn't know that she had liked doing her part particularly, it was of her cripple children that she was thinking. "We'll be able to get the Home now," she said.

"It was for cripple children?"

"Didn't you know? I should have thought Mamma would have told you. Yes, it all meant that, only that, to me. We gave the tableaux to get enough money to buy a country home for them."

"You go in a lot for good works, I know," said Sir Basil, and Imogen, smiling again, with the lightness rooted in excitement, answered: "They go in for me rather. All the appeals of suffering seem to come to one and seize one, don't they? One never needs to seek causes."

Jack watched them talk, Imogen, the daughter of the dead, rejected husband, and Sir Basil, her mother's suitor.

Mary had come in now, late from changing her dress, which, at the last moment, she had felt too shy to appear in. She was talking to Mrs. Wake and the Pakenhams.

Standing, a somewhat brooding onlooker, becoming conscious, indeed, of the sense, stronger than ever, of loneliness and bereavement, he heard Mrs. Upton near him say, "Sit down here, Jack."

She showed him a chair beside her, in the corner, between her tea-table, the window and the fire. She, too, was for the moment isolated; she, too, no doubt, had been watching, and now she talked to him, not at all as if she had felt that he were lonely and were making it up to him, but once more like the child happily gathering and holding out nosegays to another child.

A controlled excitement was in her, too ; and he felt still that slight strain of the lunch-table, as if Imogen's catafalque had marred some too trustful assurance ; but a growing warmth was diffused through it and, as her eyes turned once or twice on Imogen and Sir Basil, he saw the cause. The possibility that her daughter might make friends with her suitor, the solvent, soothing possibility, that, if realized, would so smooth her path, had come to her. And in their quiet firelit corner, shut the closer into their isolation by the talk that made only a confused murmur about them, he felt a new frankness in her, as though the hope of the hour effaced ominous memories and melted her reserves and discretions, making it wholly natural to draw near him in the implied avowal of shared outlooks.

" I believe that Imogen and Sir Basil are going to get on together," she said ; " I believe that she likes him already. I so want them to be friends. He is such a friend of mine."

" They look friendly," said Jack, " I think I can always tell when Imogen is going to like people." He did not add that, with his new insight about Imogen, he had observed that it was people over whom she had power that Imogen liked. And already he seemed to see that Imogen would have some sort of power over Sir Basil.

" And I can always tell when he is going to like people. He thinks her wonderful," said Valerie. She exchanged her knowledge with him ; it was touching the way in which, blind to deep change in him, she took for granted his greater claim to the interpretation of Imogen. She added : " It is a very propitious beginning, I think."

" How long is Sir Basil going to stay here ? " Jack asked.

"All summer. He goes to Canada with the Pakenhams, and out to the West, for a glimpse of the changes since he was here years and years ago; and then I want him to come to Vermont, to us. You and Imogen will both get to know him well there. Of course you are coming. Imogen told me that she asked you long ago."

"Yes; I shall enjoy that immensely," the young man answered, with, for his own consciousness, a touch of irrepressible gloom. He didn't look forward to the continuation of the drama, to his own lame and merely negative part in it, at the close quarters of a house-party among the Vermont hills. And, as if Valerie had felt the inner doubt, she added suddenly on a different key, "You really will enjoy it, won't you?"

He looked up at her. Her face, illuminated by the firelight, though dimmed against the evening blue outside, was turned on him with its sudden intentness and penetration of gaze.

"Why, of course," he almost stammered, confused by the unexpected scrutiny.

"I shall love having you, you know," she said.

"I shall love being with you," he answered, now without a single inner reserve.

Her intentness seemed to soften, there was solicitude and a sort of persuasiveness in it. "And you will have a much better chance of really adjusting things there; your friendship with Imogen, I mean. The country smooths things out. Things get sweet and simple."

He didn't know what to say. Her mistake, if it were one, was so inevitable.

"Imogen will have taken her bearings by then," she went on. "She has had so much to get accustomed to, to bear with, poor child; her great bereavement,

and—and a mother who in some ways must always be a trial to her."

"Oh, a trial," Jack lamely murmured.

"I recognize it, Jack, I think that you do. But when she makes up her mind to me and discovers that, at all events, I don't interfere with anything that she really cares about, she will be able to take up all her old threads again."

"I—I suppose so," Jack murmured.

He had dropped his eyes, for he knew that hers were on him. And now, in a lowered voice, he heard her say, "Jack, I hope that you will help me with Imogen."

"Help you? How do you mean?" Startled, he looked up.

"You know. Interpret me to her now and then when you can, with kindliness. You understand me so much more kindly than she does."

His eyes fixed on hers, deeply flushing, "Oh, but," he breathed out with almost a long sigh, "that's what I have done, you see, ever since——"

"Ever since what?"

"Since I came to understand you so much better than she does."

There was a long pause now, and, the firelight flickering low, he could hardly see her face. But he recognized change in her voice as she said: "You have? I don't mean, you know, taking my side in disputes."

"I know; I don't mean that, either, though, perhaps, I can't help doing it. For," said Jack, "it's on your side that I am, you know."

The change in her voice, but controlled, kept down, she answered quickly, "Ah, but, dear Jack, I don't want to have a side. It's that that I want her to realize.

I want her to feel that my side is hers. I want you to help me in making her feel it."

"But she'll never feel it!" Jack breathed out again. Behind the barrier of the tea-table, in the flickering dimness, they were speaking suddenly with a murmuring, yet so sharp a confidence; a confidence that in broad daylight, or in complete solitude, might have seemed impossible. All sorts of things must steal out in that persuasive, that peopled yet solitary twilight.

He knew that Valerie's eyes dwelt on him with anxiety and that it was with a faint forced smile that she asked him: "She doesn't think that I'll ever reach her side?"

"*I* don't believe you ever will," said Jack. Then, for he couldn't bear that she should misunderstand him for another moment, misunderstanding when they had come so far was too unendurable, he went on in a hurried undertone: "You aren't on her side, really. You can never be on her side. You can never be like her, or see like her. And I don't want you to. It's you who see clearly, not she. It's you who are all right."

Her long silence, after this, seemed to him like the hovering of hands upon him, as though, in darkness, she sought by touch to recognize some strange object put before her.

"But then"—she, too, only breathed it out at last—"but then—you are not on *her* side."

"That's just it," said Jack. He did not look at her, and she was silent once more before his confession.

"But," she again took up the search, "that is terrible for her, if she feels it."

"And for me too, isn't it?" he questioned, as if he turned the surfaces of the object beneath her fingers.

The soft, frightened hover seemed to go all over it, to recognize it finally, and to draw back, terrified, from recognition.

"Most terrible of all for me, if I have come between you," she said.

Her pain pierced him so that he put out his hand and took hers.

"Don't think that; you mustn't think that, not for a moment. It's not that you came between us. It's only that, because of you, I began to see things—as I hadn't seen them. It was just, well, just like seeing one colour change when another is put beside it. Imogen's blue, now that your gold has come, is turned to green; that's all that has happened."

"All that has happened! Do you know what you are saying, Jack! If my gold were gone, would the blue come back again?"

"The blue will never come back," said Jack.

He felt, as her hand tightened on his, that he would have liked to put his head down on her knees and sob like a little boy; but when she said: "And the green you cannot care for?" his own hand tightened as if they clutched some secret together, some secret that neither must dare look at. "You mustn't think that—you mustn't—and I mustn't." He said it with all the revolt and all the strength of his will and loyalty, with all his longing, too. "The real truth is that the green can't care for me unless I will see it back to blue again, and as I can't do that, and as it won't accept my present vision, there is a sort of dead-lock."

For a long moment her hand continued to grasp his, before, as if taking in the ambiguous comfort of his final definiteness, it relaxed and she drew it away.

"Perhaps she will care enough," she said.

"To accept my vision? To forego blue? To consent that I shall see her as green?"

"Yes, when she has taken up all the threads."

"Perhaps she will," said Jack.

CHAPTER XVI

IT was a few days after this, just before Jack's return to Boston—and the parting now was to be until they met in Vermont—that he and Imogen had another walk, another talk together.

The mid-May had become seasonably mild and, at Jack's suggestion, they had taken the elevated cars up to Central Park for the purpose of there seeing the wistaria in its full bloom.

They strolled in the sunlight under arbours rippling over with the exquisite purple, dark and pale, the thin fine leaves of a strange olive-green, the delicate tendrils ; they passed into open spaces where, on grey rocks, it streamed like the tresses of a cascade ; it climbed and heaped itself on wayside trellises and ran nimbly, in a shower of fragile colour, up the trunks, along the branches, of the trees. Jack always afterwards associated the soft, falling purple, the soft, languorous fragrance, the almost uncanny beauty of the wistaria, with melancholy and presage.

Imogen, for the first time since her father's death, showed a concession to the year's revival in a transparent band of white at her neck and wrists. Her little hat, too, was of transparent black, its crêpe put aside. But, though she and the day shared in bloom and youthfulness, Jack had never seen her look more heavily bodeful, had never seen her eyes more fixed, her lips more

cold and stern. The excitement that he had felt in her was gone. Her curiosity, her watchfulness, had been satisfied, and grimly rewarded. She faced sinister facts. Jack felt himself ready to face them, too.

They had spoken little in the clattering car and, for a long time after they reached the park and walked hither and thither among its paths, following at random the beckoning purple of the wistaria, neither spoke of anything but commonplaces, indicating points of view, or assenting to appreciations. But Imogen said at last, and he knew that with the words she led him up to those facts: "Do you remember, Jack, the day we met Mamma, you and I, on the docks?"

Jack replied that he did.

"What a different day from this," said Imogen, "with its frosty glory, its challenge, its strength."

"Very different."

"And how different our lives are," said Imogen.

He did not reply for some moments and it was then to say, gently, that he hoped they were not so different as, perhaps, they seemed.

"It is not I who have changed, Jack," said Imogen, looking before her; and going on, as though she wished to hear no reply to this. "Do you remember what we felt as the steamer came in? We determined that *she* should change nothing, that we wouldn't yield to any menace of the things we were then united in holding dear. . . . It's strange, isn't it, to see how subtly she has changed everything. It's as if our frosty, sparkling landscape, all wind and vigour and discipline, were suddenly transformed to this—"—Imogen looked about her at the limpid day—"to soft yielding, soft colour, soft perfume—it's like Mamma, that frag-

rance of the wistaria—to something smiling, languid, alluring. This is the sort of day on which one drifts. Our past day was a day of steering."

As much as for the meaning of her careful words, Jack felt rising in him an anger against the sense of a readiness prepared beforehand. "You describe it all very prettily, Imogen," he answered, mastering his anger. "But I don't agree with you."

"You seldom do, now, Jack. Perhaps it's because I've remained in my own climate while you have been borne by the 'warm, sweet, harmless' current into this one."

"I am not conscious of any tendency to drift, Imogen. I still steer. I intend, very firmly, always to steer."

"To what, may I ask?"

He was silent for a moment, then said, lifting eyes in which she read all that new steeliness of opposition with, yet, through it, the sadness of hopeless appeal: "I believe in all our ideals—just as I used to."

To this Imogen made no rejoinder.

"Do you like Sir Basil?" she asked presently, after they had for some time followed the windings of a long path in a heavy silence.

"I've hardly seen him." Jack's voice had a forced lightness, as though for relief at the change of subject; but he guessed that the change was only apparent. "He is very nice; very delightful looking."

"Yes, very delightful looking. Do you happen to remember what I said to you about him, long ago, in the winter?—About him and Mamma?"

"Yes"—Jack flushed—"I remember."

"I told you to wait."

"Yes; you told me to wait."

"You will own, now, I hope, that I was right."

"Right in thinking that he—that they were more than friends?"

"Right in thinking that he was in love with her, that she allowed it."

"I suppose you were right."

"I was right. And it's more than that, now. I have every reason to believe that she intends to marry him."

He ignored her portentous pause and drop of the voice, walking on with downcast eyes. "You mean, it's an accepted thing?"

"Oh, no; not yet accepted. Mamma respects the black edge, you know. But I heard Mrs. Wake and Mrs. Pakenham talking about it."

"Heard? How could you have heard?" Jack's eyes, stern with accusation, were now upon her.

It was impossible for Imogen to lie consciously, and though she had not, in her eagerness that he should own her right and share her reprobation, foreseen this confrontation, she held, before it, all the dignity of full sincerity. "You are changed, indeed, Jack, when you can suspect me of eavesdropping. I was asleep on the sofa in the library, worn out with work, and I woke to hear them talking in the next room, with the door ajar. I did not realize, for some moments, what was being said. And then they went out."

"Of course I don't suspect you—of course I don't think that you would eavesdrop; though I do hate—hearing," Jack muttered.

"I hope you realize that I share your hatred," said Imogen; "but your opinion of me is not, here, to the point. I only wish to put before you what I have now to bear. Mrs. Pakenham said that she wagered that

before the year was out Sir Basil would have married Mamma." Imogen paused, breathing deeply.

Jack walked on beside her, not knowing what to say. "I think so, too, and wish her joy," would have been the truest rendering of his feeling. He curbed it to ask cautiously: "And you mind so much?"

"Mind!" she repeated, a thunderous echo.

"You dislike it so?"

"Dislike? You use strangely inapt words."

He had another parenthetic shoot of impatience with her dreadful articulateness; had Imogen always talked so much like the heroine of a novel with a purpose?

"I only meant—can't you put up with it?"

"Put up with it? Can I do anything else? What power have I over her? You don't seem to understand. I have passed beyond caring that she makes herself petty, ridiculous—as a woman of her age must in marrying again—the clutch of fading life at the happiness it has forfeited. Let her clutch if she chooses, let her marry if she chooses, whom she chooses, yes, when she chooses. But don't you see how it shatters my every hope of her, my every ideal of her? And don't you see how my heart is pierced by the presence of that man in my father's house, the house that she abandoned and cast a shadow upon? how filled with bitter shame and anguish I am when I see him there, in that house, sacred to my grief and to my memories, making love to my mother?"

No, really, never, never had he heard Imogen so fluent and so dramatically telling, and never had he been so unmoved by the feeling under the fluency. It was as if he could believe in none.

He remained silent and Imogen continued: "When she came back, I believe that it was with an impulse

of penitence, with the wish, shallow though I knew that it must be in such a nature, to atone to me for the ruin that she had made in his life. I was all tenderness and sympathy for her, all a longing to help and sustain her —as you must remember. But now—it fulfils all that I had feared and suspected in her—and more than all! She left England, she came here, that the conventions might be observed, and, considering them observed enough for her purpose, she receives her suitor —eight months after my father's lonely death—in the house where *my* heart breaks and bleeds for him, where *I* mourn for him, where *I*—alone, it seems—feel him flouted and betrayed! And she talks of her love for me!"

Jack was wondering that her coherent passion did not beat him into helpless acquiescence; but, instead, he found himself at once replying, "You don't see fairly. You exaggerate it all. She was unhappy with your father. For years he made her unhappy. And now, if she can care for a man who can make her happy, she has a right, a perfect right, to take her happiness. As for her loving you, I don't believe that any one loves you more truly. It's your chance, now, to show your love for her."

Imogen stood still and looked at him from the black disk of her parasol.

"I think I've suspected this of you, too, Jack," she said. "Yes, I've suspected, in dreadful moments of revelation, how far your undermining has gone. And you say you are not changed!"

"Would you ask your mother never to marry again?"

"I would—if she were in any way to redeem her image in my eyes. But, granting to the full that one

must make concessions to such creatures of the senses, I would ask her, at the very least, to have waited."

"Creatures of the senses!" Jack repeated in a helpless gasp, such words, in their austere vocabulary, were hardly credible. "Do you know what you are saying, you arrogant, you heartless girl?"

Her face seemed to flash at him like lightning from a black cloud and with the lightning a reality that had lacked before to leap to her voice. "Ah! At last—at last you are saying what you have felt for a long time! At last I know what you think of me! So be it! I don't retract one jot or tittle of what I say. Mamma is a perfectly moral woman, if you actually imagine some base imputation; but she lives for the pleasant, the pretty, the easy. She doesn't love this man's soul—nor care if he has one. Her love for him is a parody of the love that my father taught me to understand and to hold sacred. She loves his love for her; his 'delightful' appearance. She loves his place and name and all the power and leisure of the life he can give her. She loves the world—in him—and in that I mean and repeat that she is a creature of the senses. And if, for this, you think me arrogant and heartless you do not trouble in one whit my vision of myself, but you do, for ever, mar my vision of you."

They stood face to face in the soft sweet air under an arch of wistaria; it seemed a place to plight a troth, not to break one; but Jack knew that, if he would, he could not have kept the truth from her. It held him, looked from him; he was, at last, inevitably, to speak it.

"Imogen," he said, "I don't want to talk to you about your mother; I don't want to defend her to you; I'm past that. I'll say nothing of your summing up of

her character—it's grotesque, it's piteous, such assurance. But I do tell you, straight, what I've come to feel of you—that you are a cold-blooded, self-righteous, self-centred girl. And I'll say more—I think that your bringing-up, the artificiality, the complacent theory of it, is your best excuse ; and I think that you'll never find any one so generous, and so understanding of you as your mother. If this mars me in your eyes, I can't help it."

For a moment, in her deep anger—horror running through it, too, as though the very bottom had dropped out of things and she saw emptiness beneath her—she thought that she would tell him to leave her there, for ever. But Imogen's intelligence was at times a fairly efficacious substitute for deeper promptings ; and humiliation, instead of enwrapping her mind in a flare of passionate vanity, seemed, when such intellectual apprehension accompanied it, to clarify, to steady her thoughts. She saw now, in the sudden uncanny illumination, that, in all her vehemence of this afternoon, there had been something fictitious. The sorrow, the resentment, on her father's account, she had indeed long felt ; too long to feel it keenly. Her disapproval of the second marriage was already tinctured by a certain satisfaction ; it would free her of a thorn in the flesh, for such her mother's presence in her life had become—and it would justify for ever her sense of superiority. It was all the clearest cause for indignation that her mother had given her, and, seeing it as such she had longed to make Jack share her secure reprobation ; but she hadn't really been able to feel it as she saw it. It solved too many problems and salved too many hurts. So now, standing there under the arch of wistaria, she saw through herself, saw, at the very

basis of her impulse, the dislocation that had made its demonstration dramatic and unconvincing. Dreadful as the humiliation was, her lips growing parched, her throat hot and dry with it, her intelligence saw its cause too clearly for her to resent it as she would have resented one less justified. There was, perhaps, something to be said for Jack—disastrously wrong though he was, and, with all her essental rightness, there was perhaps something to be said against her. She could not break, without further reflection, the threads that still held them together.

So, at the moment of their deepest hostility, Jack was to have his sweetest impression of her. She didn't order him away in tragic tones, as he almost expected; she didn't overwhelm him with an icy torrent of reproach and argument. Instead, as she stood there against her halo of black, the long regard of her white face fixed on him, her eyes suddenly filled with tears. She didn't acquiesce for a moment, or for a moment imply him anything but miserably, pitiably wrong, but, in a voice from which every trace of anger had faded, she said, "Oh, Jack, how you hurt me."

The shock of his surprise was so great that his cheeks flamed as though she had struck him. Answering tears sprung to his eyes. He stammered, could not speak at first, then got out: "Forgive me. I'd no business to say it. It's lovely of you, Imogen, not just to send me off."

She felt her triumph, her half-triumph, at once. "Why, Jack, if you think it, why should I forgive you for saying what to you seems the truth? You have forgotten me, Jack, almost altogether; but don't forget that truth is the thing that I care most for. If you must think these things of me—and not only of

me—of a dearer self—for I understand all that you meant—I must accept the sorrow and pain of it. When we care for people we must accept suffering because of them. Perhaps in time you may come to see differently."

He knew, though she made him feel so abashed, that he could take back none of the " things " he thought; but as she had smiled faintly at him he answered with a wavering smile, putting out his hand to hers and holding it while he said, " Shall we agree, then, to say nothing more about it? To be as good friends—as the truth will let us? "

He had never hurt her as at that moment of gentleness, compunction and inflexibility, and thought for a moment was obscured by a rush of bitter pain that could almost have cast her upon his breast, weeping and suppliant for all that his words shut the door on —perhaps for ever.

But such impulses were swifty mastered in poor Imogen. Gravely pressing his hand, she accepted the cutting compact and, over her breathless sense of loss, held firm to the spiritual advantage of magnanimity and courage. He judged himself, not her, in letting her go, if he was really letting her go; and she must see him wander away into the darkness alone, leaving her alone. It was tragic; it was nearly unendurable; but this was one of life's hard lessons; her father had so often told her that they must be unflinchingly faced, unflinchingly conquered. So she triumphed over the weak crying out of human need.

They walked on slowly again, both feeling a little " done." Neither spoke until, at the entrance of the park, and just before leaving its poetry for the screaming prose of the great city, Imogen said: " One thing I

want to tell you, Jack, and that is that you may trust Mamma to me. Whatever I may think of this happiness that she is reaching out for, I shall not make it difficult or painful for her to take it. My pain shall cast no shadow on her gladness."

Jack's face still showed its flush and his voice had all the steadiness of his own interpretation, the steadiness of his refusal to accept hers, as he answered: "Thanks, Imogen; that's very right of you."

CHAPTER XVII

IMOGEN and Sir Basil were walking down a woodland path under the sky of American summer, a vast, high, cloudless dome of blue. Trees, tall and delicate, in early June foliage, grew closely on the hillside; the grass of the open glades was thick with wild Solomon's-seal, and fragile clusters of wild columbine grew in the niches and crannies of the rocks, their pale red chalices filled with fantastically fretted gold.

Imogen, dressed in thin black lawn, fine pleatings of white at throat and wrists, her golden head uncovered, walked a little before Sir Basil with her long, light, deliberate step. She had an errand in the village two miles away, and her mother had suggested that Sir Basil should go with her and have some first impressions of rural New England. He had only arrived the night before. Miss Bocock and the Potts were expected this afternoon, and Mrs. Wake had been for a fortnight established in her tiny cottage on the opposite hillside.

"Tell me about your village here," Sir Basil had said, and Imogen, with punctual courtesy and kindness, the fulfilment of her promise to Jack, had rejoined: "It would be rather uneventful annals that I should have to tell you. The people are palely prosperous. They lead monotonous lives. They look forward for variety and interest, I think, to the summer, when all of us are here. One does all one can, then, to make

some colour for them. I have organized a kindergarten for the tiny children and a girls' club for debates and reading; it will help to an awakening, I believe. I'm going to the club this afternoon. I'm very grateful to my girls for helping me as they do to be of use to them. It's quite wonderful what they have done already. Our village life is in no sense like yours in England, you know; these people are all very proud and independent. It's as a friend, not as a Lady Bountiful, that I go among them."

"I see," said Sir Basil with interest, "that's awfully nice all round. I wish we could get rid of a lot of stupid ways of thought at home. I'll see something of these friends of yours at the house, then. I'm immensely interested in all these differences, you know."

"You won't see them at the house. Our relation is friendly, not social. That is a froth that doesn't count."

"Oh, and they don't mind that—not having the social relation, I mean—if they are friends?"

"Why should they? I am not hurt because they do not ask me to their picnics and parties, nor are they because I don't ask them to my dinners and teas. We both understand that all that is a matter of manner and accident; that, in essentials, we are equal."

"I see; but," Sir Basil still queried, "you wouldn't care about their parties, I suppose, and don't you think they might like your dinners? At least that's the way it would work out, I'm afraid, at home."

"Ah, it doesn't here. They are too civilized for that. Neither of us would feel fitted to the superficial aspects of the others' lives."

"We have that sort of thing in England, too, you know, only perhaps we look at it more from the other side and recognize difference rather than sameness."

"Very much more, I think," said Imogen with a slight smile. "I should think that there was very little resemblance. Your social structure is a wholesome natural growth, embodying ideals that, in the main, are unconscious. We started from that and have been building ever since towards conscious ideals."

"Well"—Sir Basil passed over this simile, a little perplexed—"it's very wonderful that they shouldn't feel—inferior, you know, in our ugly sense of the word, if they only get one side of friendship and not the other. Now that's how we manage in England, you see; but then I'm afraid it doesn't work out as you say it does here. I'm afraid they do feel inferior, after a fashion."

"Only the truly inferior could feel inferiority, since they get the real side of friendship," said Imogen with gentle authority. "And I can't think that, in our sense of the word, the real side is given with you. There is conscious condescension, conscious adaptation to a standard supposed lower."

"I see, I see," Sir Basil murmured, looking, while still perplexed, rather conscience stricken—"yes, I suppose you're right."

Imogen looked as though she more than supposed it, and, feeling himself quite worsted, Sir Basil went on to question her further about the club and kindergarten.

"What a lot of work it must all mean for you," he said.

"That, I think, is one's only right to the advantages one has—education, taste, inherited traditions," said Imogen, willing to enlighten this charmingly civilized, yet spiritually barbarous interlocutor, who followed her, tall, in his delightfully outdoor looking garments,

his tie and the tilt of his Panama hat answering her nicest sense of fitness, and his handsome brown face, quizzical, yet very attentive, meeting her eyes on its leafy background whenever she turned her head. "If they are not made instruments to use for others they rust in our hands and poison us," she said. "That's the only real significance of an aristocracy, a class fitted to serve, with the highest service, the needs of all. Of course, much of our best and deepest thought about these things is English, don't imagine me ungrateful to the noble thinkers of your—of my—race—they have moulded and inspired us; but, there is the strange paradox of your civilization, your thought reacts so little on your life. Your idealists and seers count only for your culture, and even in your culture affect so little the automatic existence of your people. They form a little isolated class, a leaven that lies outside the lump. Now with us, thought rises, works, ferments through every section of our common life."

Quite without fire, almost indolently, she spoke—very simply, too, glancing round at him as though she could not expect much understanding from such an alien listener.

"I'm awfully glad, you know, to get you to talk to me like this," said Sir Basil, after a meditative pause. "I saw a good bit of you in New York, but you never talked much with me."

"You had Mamma to talk to."

"But I want to talk to you, too. You do a lot of thinking, I can see that."

"I try to;" she smiled a little at his *naïveté*.

"Your mother told me so much about you that I'm tremendously eager to know you for myself."

"Well, I hope that you may come to, for Mamma's

pictures of me are not likely to be accurate," said Imogen mildly. "We don't think in the same way or see things in the same way, and, though we are so fond of each other, we are not interested in the same things. Perhaps that is why I don't interest her particular friends. They would not find much in common between Mamma and me; " but her smile was now a little humorous and she was quite prepared for his: "Oh, but I assure you I am interested in you."

Already, with her unerring instinct for power, Imogen knew that Sir Basil was interested in her. There was only, to be sure, a languid pleasure in the sense of power over a person already, as it were, so bespoken, so in bondage to other cults, but, though without a trace of coquetry, the smile quietly claimed him as a partial, a damaged convert. Imogen always knew when people were capable of being, as she expressed it to herself, "Hers." She made small effort for those who were without the capacity. She never misdirected such smiles upon Rose, or Miss Bocock, or Mrs. Wake. And now, as Sir Basil went on to asseverate, just behind her shoulder, his pleasant tones quite touched with eagerness, that the more he saw of her the more interested he became, she allowed him to draw her into a playful argument on the subject.

"Yes, I quite believe that you would like me—if you came to know me,"—she was willing to concede at last—"but no, indeed no, I don't think that you would ever feel much interest in me."

"You mean because I'm not sufficiently interesting myself? Is that it, eh?" Sir Basil acutely asked, reflecting that he had never seen a girl walk so beautifully or dress so exquisitely. The sunlight glittered in her hair.

"I don't mean that at all," said Imogen, "although I don't fancy that you are interested so deeply and in so many things, as I am."

"Now really! Why not? You haven't given me a chance to show you. Of course I'm not clever."

"I meant nothing petty, like cleverness."

"You mean that I don't take life seriously enough to please you?"

"Not that, exactly. It's that we face in opposite directions, as it were. Life isn't to you what it is to me, it isn't to you such a big, beautiful thing, with so many wonderful vistas in it, such far, high peaks."

She was very grave now, and the gravity, the assurance, and, with them, the sweetness of this young girl, were charming and perplexing to Sir Basil. Girls so assured he had found harsh, disagreeable and, almost always, ugly; they had been the sort of girl to be avoided. And girls so lovely had usually been coy and foolish. This girl walked like a queen, looked at you like a philosopher, smiled at you like an angel.

He fixed his mind on her last words, rallying his sense of quizzical paternity to meet such disconcerting statements.

"Well, but you are very young; life looks like that, peaks, you know and vistas, and all the rest, when one is young. You've not had time to find it out, to be disappointed," said Sir Basil.

Imogen's calm eye rested upon him, and even before she spoke, he knew that he had made a very false step. It was as if, sunken to the knees in his foolish bog, he stood before her while she replied—

"Ah, it's that that is shallow in you, or, let us say, undeveloped, still to be able to think of life in those terms. They are the thoughts of an unawakened

person, and some people, I know, go all through life without awaking. You imagine, I suppose, that I think of life as something that is going to give me happiness—to fulfil sentimental, girlish dreams. You are mistaken. I have known bitter disappointments, bitter losses, bitter shatterings of hope. But life is wonderful and beautiful to me because we can be our best and do our best in it, and for it, if we *try*. It's an immense adventure of the soul, an adventure that can disappoint only in the frivolous sense you were thinking of. Such joys are not the objects of our quest. One is disappointed with oneself, often, for falling so short of one's vision, and people whom we love and trust may fail us and give us piercing pain ; but life, in all its oneness, is good and beautiful if we wake to its deepest reality and give our hearts to the highest that we know."

She spoke sadly, softly, surely, thinking of her own deep wounds, and to speak such words was almost like repeating a familiar lesson—how often she had heard them on her father's lips—and Sir Basil listened, while he looked at the golden head, at the white hand stretched out now and then to put aside a branch or sapling, listened with an amazement half baffled and wholly admiring. He had never heard a girl talk like that. He had heard such words before, often, of course, but they had never sounded like this ; they seemed fresh and sparkling with a heavenly dew, spoken so quietly, with such indifference to their effect, such calmness of conviction. The first impression of her, that always hovered near, grew more strongly upon him. There was something heavenly about this girl. It was as though he had heard an angel singing in the woods and a feeling of humility stole over him. It

was usual for Sir Basil, who rarely thought about himself, to feel modest, but very unusual for him to feel humble.

"You make me believe it, when you say it," he murmured. "I'm afraid you think me a dreadfully earthy, commonplace person."

Imogen, at the change of note in his voice, looked round at him, more really aware of him than she had been at all, and when she met his glance the prophet's calm fervour rose in her to answer the faith that she felt in him. She paused, letting him come abreast of her in the narrow path and they both stood still, looking at each other.

"You are not earthy, you are not commonplace," said Imogen, then, as a result of her contemplation. "I believe that you are a very big person, Sir Basil."

"A big person? How do you mean?" He absolutely flushed, half abashed, half delighted.

Imogen continued to gaze, clearly and deeply. "There are all sorts of possibilities in you."

"Oh, come now! At my age! Why any possibilities are over, except for a cheerful kind of vegetating."

"You have vegetated all your life, I can see that. No one has ever waked you. You have hardly *used* your soul at all. It's with you as it is with your country; its life is built strongly and sanely with body and brain, but it has not felt, nationally, as a whole, its spirit. Like it, you have a spirit; like it, you are full of possibilities."

"Miss Upton, you aren't like anybody I've ever known. What sort of possibilities?"

She walked on now, feeling his thrill echo in herself, symptomatic of the passing forth of power and its return as enrichment of life and inspiration to help-

fulness. "Of service," she said. "Of devotion to great needs, courage in great causes. I don't think that you have ever had a chance."

Sir Basil, keeping his eyes on her straight, pale profile, groping and confused in this new flood of light, wondered if he had.

"You are an extraordinary young woman," he said at last. "You make me believe in everything you say, though it's so awfully queer, you know, to think in that way about myself. If you talk to me often like this, about needs and causes, will it give me more of a chance, do you think?"

"We must all win to the light for ourselves," said Imogen very gently, "but we can help one another."

They had come now to the edge of the wood and out upon the white road that curved from the village up to the blue of the hills they had descended. A tiny brook ran with a sharp, silvery tinkle on its further edge and it was bordered by a light barrier of white railing. Beyond were spacious, half-cultivated meadows, stretched out for miles in the lap of low-lying hills.

Serene yet inhuman the landscape looked, a background to the thinnest of histories, significant only of its own dreaming solitude, and the village, among its elms, a little further on, suggested the barest past, the most barren future. The road led on into its main street, where the elms made a stately avenue, arching over scattered frame houses of buff and grey and white. Imogen told Sir Basil that some of these houses were old and pointed out an austere classic façade with pediment and pillars; explained to him, too, the pathetic condition of so much of abandoned New England. Sir Basil was thinking more of her last words in the woods

than of local colour, but he had, while he listened, a fairly definite impression of pinchbeck shops, of shabby awnings slanting in the sunlight over heaps of tumbled fruit and vegetables ; of " buggys," slip-shod, with dust-whitened wheels ; the long-tailed, long-maned, slightly harnessed horses hitched to posts along the pavements. The faces that passed were indolent yet eager. The jaws of many worked mechanically at some unappeasing task of mastication.

Sir Basil had travelled since his arrival in America, had seen the luxuries of the Atlantic sea-coast, the purposeful energy of Chicago, California's Eden-like abundance, and had seen other New England villages where beauty was cherished and made permanent. He hardly needed Imogen's further comments to establish his sense of contrast.

" This was always a poor enough little place. Any people who made it count left it long ago. But, even here," she went on, " even in its stagnation, one can find some of the things we care for in our country, some of the things we live for."

Some of these things seemed personified in the figure of the young woman who met them in the girl's club, among the shelves of books and the numerous framed photographs from the old masters. Imogen introduced Sir Basil to her and he watched her with interest while she and Imogen discussed some business matters. She was slender and upright, perhaps too upright ; in manner, unaffected and assured, perhaps too assured ; but that Sir Basil did not observe. He found her voice unpleasant and her pronunciation faulty, but thought that she expressed herself with great force and fluency. Her eyes were bright, her skin sallow, she smiled gravely, and her calmness and

her smile reminded Sir Basil a little of Imogen; perhaps they were racial. She was dressed in a simple grey cotton frock with neat lawn collar and cuffs, and her hair was raised in a lustrous "pompadour," a wide comb traversing it behind and combs at the sides of her head upholding it in front. Towards Sir Basil she behaved with gracious stateliness of demeanour, so that he wondered anew at the anomalous ideals of a country where a young person so well-appearing should not be asked to dinner.

Several other girls came in while they were there, and they all surrounded Imogen with eager familiarity of manner, all displayed towards himself, as he was introduced, variations of Miss Hickson's stateliness. He thought it most delightful and interesting and the young women very remarkable persons. Only one discordant note occurred to mar the harmony, and that discord was barely discerned by his untrained ear. While Imogen was talking, a girl appeared in the doorway, hesitated, then, with an indifferent and forbidding manner, strolled across the room to the bookshelves where she selected a book, strolling out again with the barest nod of sullen recognition. She was a swarthy girl, robust and ample of form, with black eyes and dusky cheeks. Her torn red blouse and untidy hair marked her out from the sleek and social group. Sir Basil thought her very interesting looking.

He asked Imogen, as they walked away under the elms, who she was.

"That artistic young person, with the dark hair."

"Artistic? Do you mean Mattie Smith? the girl with the bad manners?" asked Imogen, smiling tolerantly.

"Yes, she looked like a clever young person. She belongs to the club?"

"She hardly counts as one of its members, though we welcome every one and, like all the girls of the village, she enjoys the use of our library. She is not clever, however. She is an envious and a rather ill-tempered girl, with very little of the spirit of sisterhood in her. And she nurses her defect of isolation and self-sufficiency. I hope that we may win her over to wider, sweeter outlooks some day."

Mattie Smith, however, was one of the people upon whom Imogen wasted no smiles. On the Upton's first coming to spend their summers near Harborough, Imogen had found this indolent, yet forcible personality barring her path of benignant activity. Mattie Smith, unaided, undirected, ignorant of the Time Spirit's high demands upon the individual, had already formed a club of sorts, a tawdry little room hung with bright bunting and adorned with coloured pictures from the cheaper magazines, pictures of over elegant, amorously inclined young couples in ball-rooms or on yachts and beaches. Here the girls read poor literature, played games, made candy over the stove and gossiped about their young men. Imogen deeply disapproved of the place, its ventilation was atrocious, and its moral influence harmful; it relaxed and did not discipline, so she had expressed it to her father. It soon withered under her rival beams. Mattie Smith's members drifted, by degrees, into the more advantageous alliance. Mattie Smith had resented this triumphant placing of the higher standard and took pains, as Imogen, with the calm displeasure of the successful, observed, to make difficulties for her and to treat her with ostentatious disregard. Imogen

guessed very accurately at the seething of anger and jealousy that bubbled in Mattie Smith's breast, it was typical of so much of the lamentable spirit displayed by rudimentary natures when feeling the pressure of an ideal they did not share or when brought into contact with a more finished manner of life from which they were excluded. Imogen, too, could not have borne a rival ascendancy, but she was ascendant through right divine and, while so acutely understanding Mattie Smith's state of mind, she could not recognize a certain sameness of nature. She hoped that Mattie Smith would "grow," but she felt that, essentially, she was not of the sort from which "hers" were made.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was almost four o'clock by the time that Imogen and Sir Basil reached the summit of one of the lower hills and, among the trees, came upon the white glimmer of Mrs. Upton's summer home. It stood in a wide clearing, surrounded on three sides by the woods, the higher ranges rising about it, its lawn running down to slopes of long grass, thick with tall daisies and buttercups. Further on was an orchard, and then, beyond the dip of a valley, the blue, undulating distance, bathed in a crystalline quivering. The house, of rough white stucco, had lintels and window-frames of dark wood, a roof of grey shingles and bright green shutters. A wide verandah ran around it, wreathed in vines and creepers, and borders of flowers grew to the edges of the woods. Sir Basil thought that he had never seen anything prettier. Valerie, dressed in thin black, was sitting on the verandah, and beside her Miss Bocock, still in travelling dress, looked incongruously ungraceful. She had arrived an hour before with the Potts, who had gone to their rooms, and said, in answer to Imogen's kindly queries, that the journey hadn't been bad though the train was very stuffy. Then it appeared that Miss Bocock and Sir Basil were acquainted; they recollected each other, shook hands heartily, and asked and answered local questions. Miss Bocock's people lived

not so many miles from Thremdon Priory and, though she had been little at home of late years, she and Sir Basil had country memories in common. She said presently that she, too, would like to tidy for tea, and Imogen, taking her to her room, sat with her while she smoothed one section of her hair and tonged the other and while she put on a very stiff holland skirt and a blouse distressing to Imogen's sensitive taste, a crude pink blouse, irrelevantly adorned about the shoulders with a deep frill of imitation lace. While she dressed she talked, in her high-pitched, cheerful voice, of the recent very successful lectures she had given in Boston and the acquaintances she had made there.

"I hope that my letters of introduction proved useful," said Imogen. She considered Miss Bocock her *protégée*, but Miss Bocock, very vexatiously, seemed always oblivious of that fact, so that Imogen, though feeling that she had secured a guest who conferred lustre, couldn't resist, now and then, trying to bring her to a slightly clearer sense of obligation.

Miss Bocock said that, yes, they had been very useful and Imogen watched her select from the graceful nosegay on her dressing-table two red roses which she pinned to her pink blouse with a heavy silver brooch representing, in an encircling bough, a mother bird hovering, with outstretched wings, over a precariously placed nest.

"Let me get you a white rose," Imogen suggested; but Miss Bocock said, no, thanks, she was very fond of that shade of red.

"So you know Sir Basil," said Imogen, repressing her sense of irritation.

"Know him? Yes, of course. Everybody in the

county knows him. He is the big man thereabouts, you see. The old squire, his father, was very fond of my father, and we go to a garden-party at the Priory once a year or so. It's a nice old place."

Imogen felt some perplexity. "But if your father and his were such friends why don't you see more of each other?"

Miss Bocock looked cheerfully at her. "Why, because he is big and we aren't. We are middle class and he very much upper; it's a very old family, the Thremdon's—I forget for how many generations they have been in Surrey. My dear old dad was only a country doctor," Miss Bocock went on, seated in a rocking-chair—she liked rocking-chairs—with her knees crossed, her horribly shaped patent leather shoes displayed and her clear eyes, through their glasses, fixed on Imogen, while she made these unshrinking statements; "and a country doctor's family hasn't much to do with county people."

"What an ugly thing," said Imogen, while, swiftly, her mind adjusted itself to this new seeing of Miss Bocock. Under the illumination Miss Bocock's assurance towards herself grew more irritating than before, and the fact that Miss Bocock's flavour was very different from Sir Basil's became more apparent.

"Not at all," said Miss Bocock, "it's a natural crystallization. You are working towards the same sort of thing over here, only not in such a wholesome way, I think."

Imogen flushed a little. "Our crystallizations, when they aren't artificially brought about by apings of your civilization, take place through real superiority and fitness. A woman of your intellectual ability is anybody's equal in America."

"Oh, as far as that goes, in that sense, I'm anybody's equal in England, too," said Miss Bocock, unperturbed and unimpressed.

Imogen rather wished she could make her feel that, since crystallizations were a fact, the Upton's in that sense, were as much above her as the Thremdons. Idealist democrat as she counted herself, she had these quick glances at a standard kept, as it were, for private use, as if from under an altar in the temple of humanity its priest were to draw out, for some personal reassurance, a hidden yard-measure.

Tea, when they went down again, was served on the verandah, and Imogen could observe, during its progress, that Miss Bocock showed none of the disposition to fawn on Sir Basil that one might have expected from a person of the middle class. She contradicted him as cheerfully as she did Imogen herself.

Mr. and Mrs. Potts had gone for a little ramble in the lower woods, but they soon appeared, Mr. Potts seating himself limply on the steps and fanning himself with his broad straw hat—a hat that in its very largeness and looseness seemed to express the inflexible ideals of nonconformity—while Mrs. Potts, very firmly busked and bridled, her head very sleek, her smile very tight, took a chair between Mrs. Upton and Sir Basil, and soon showed, in her whole demeanour, a consciousness of the latter's small titular decoration that placed her more definitely for Imogen's eye than she had ever been placed before. The Potts were middle class with a vengeance. Imogen's irritation grew as she watched these limpet-like friends, one sprawling and ill-at-ease for all his careful languor, the other quite dreadfully well-mannered, sipping her tea, arching her brows and assuming all sorts of

perilous elegancies of pronunciation that Imogen had never before heard her attempt. It was an additional vexation to have them display towards herself, with even more exaggeration than usual, their tenacious tenderness, listening, with a grave turning of head and eye when she spoke and receiving each remark with an over-emphasis of feeling on their over-mobile features.

There was, indeed, an odd irony in the Potts being there at all. They had, in her father's lifetime, only been asked with a horde of their kind, the whole uplifted batch thus worked off together, and Imogen had really not expected her mother to agree to her suggestion that they should be invited to pay the annual visit during Sir Basil's stay. She would not own to herself that her suggestion had been made from a vague wish to put her mother to a test, to force her into a definite declaration against the incongruous guests; she had thought of the suggestion, rather, as an upholding of her father's banner before the oncoming betrayal; but, instead of refusal, she had met with an instant, happy acquiescence, and it was now surely the climax of irony to see how her mother, for her sake, bore with them. More than for her sake, perhaps. Imogen detected, in those seemingly indolent yet so observant eyes, a keen reading of the Potts' perturbed condition, and in her manner, so easy and so apt, the sweetest, lightest kindness. She turned corners and drew veils for them, and spread a warm haze of interest and serenity about their clumsy and obtruding personalities. Imogen could even see that the Potts were reconsidering, with some confusion of mind, their old verdict on her mother.

This realization brought to her brooding thoughts

a sudden pang of self-reproach. It wouldn't do for the Potts to find in her mother the cordiality they might miss in herself. She confessed that, for a moment, she had allowed the banner to trail in the dust of worldly thoughts, the banner to which the Potts, poor dears, had rallied for so many loyal years. She summoned once more all her funds of spiritual appreciation and patience. As for Miss Bocock, she made not the slightest attempt to talk to the Potts. She had come up with them from the station—they had not found each other on the train—and she had probably had her fill of them in that time. Once or twice, in the act of helping herself plentifully to cake, she paused to listen to them and after that looked away, over their heads, or through them, as if she finally dismissed them from the field of her attention. Mrs. Potts was questioning Sir Basil about his possible knowledge of her own English ancestry. "We came over in the May-Flower, you know," she said.

"Really," said Sir Basil, all courteous interest.

"The Claremonts, you know," said Mrs. Potts, modestly, yet firmly, too. "My father was in direct descent—we have it all worked out in our family tree."

"Oh, really," said Sir Basil again.

"I've no doubt," said Mrs. Potts, "that your forebears and mine, Sir Basil, were friends and comrades in the spacious times of good Queen Bess."

Imogen, at this, glanced swiftly at her mother; but she caught no trace of wavering on that mild countenance.

"Oh, well, no," Sir Basil answered. "My people were very little country squires in those days; we didn't have much to do with the Dukes of Claremont.

We only began to go up, you see, a good bit after you were on the top."

Imogen fixed a calm but a very cold eye upon Mrs. Potts. She had heard of the Dukes of Claremont for many years ; so had everybody who knew Mrs. Potts ; they were an innocent, an ingrained illusion of the good lady's, but to-day they seemed less innocent and more irritating than usual. Imogen felt that she could have boxed Mrs. Potts' silly ears. In Sir Basil's pleasant disclaimers, too, there was an echo of Miss Bocock's matter of fact acknowledgments that seemed to set them both leagues away from the Potts and to make their likeness greater than their difference.

" Well, of course," Mrs. Potts was going on, her pince-nez and all her small features mingled, as it were, in the vividest glitter, " for me, I confess, it's blood, above all and beyond all, that counts, and you and I, Sir Basil, know that it is in the squirearchy that some of the best blood in England is found. We don't recognize an aristocracy in our country, Sir Basil, but, though not recognized, it rules ; blood must rule ; one often, in a democracy, feels that as one's problem."

" It's only through service that it rules," Mr. Potts suddenly ejaculated from where he sat doubled on the steps looking with a gloomy gaze into the distance. " Service ; service ; that's our watchword. Lend a hand."

Imogen saw a latent boredom piercing Sir Basil's affability. Great truths, uttered by some lips, might be made to seem very unefficacious. She proposed to him that she should show him the wonderful display of mountain-laurel that grew higher up

among the pine-woods. He rose with alacrity, but Mrs. Potts rose too. Imogen could hardly control her vexation when, flipping the crumbs from her lap and smoothing the folds at her waist, she declared that she was just in the humour for a walk and must see the laurel with them.

"You mustn't tire yourself. Wouldn't you rather stay and have another cup of tea and talk to me?" Mrs. Upton interposed, so that Imogen felt a dart of keen gratitude for such comprehension; but Mrs. Potts was not to be turned aside from her purpose. "Thank you so much, dear Mrs. Upton," she answered; "we must have many, many talks indeed; but I do want to see my precious Imogen, and to see the laurel with her. You are one of those rare beings, darling Imogen, with whom one can *share* nature. Will you come, too, Delancy, dear?" she asked her husband, "or will you stay and talk to Mrs. Upton and Miss Bocock? I'm sure that they will be eager to hear of this new peace committee of ours and zestful to help on the cause."

Mr. Potts rather sulkily said that he would stay and talk to Mrs. Upton and Miss Bocock about the committee and Imogen felt that it was in a manner of atonement to him for her monopolization of a lustrous past that Mrs. Potts, presently, as they began the steep ascent along a winding, mossy path, told Sir Basil that her husband, too, knew the responsibility and burden of "blood," and Imogen fancied that she heard the murmur of quite a new great name casting its aegis about Mr. Potts. Very spiritual people could, she reflected, become strangely mendacious when borne along on the wings of ardour and exultation.

Mrs. Potts' presence was really quite intolerable, and, as she walked behind her and listened to her murmur, Imogen bethought her of an amusing, though rather ruthless, plan of elimination. Imogen was very capable of ruthlessness when circumstances demanded it. Turning, therefore, suddenly, to the right she led them into a steep and rocky path that, as she well knew, would eventually prove impassable to Mrs. Potts' short legs and stiff, fat person. Indeed, Mrs. Potts soon began to pant and sigh. Her recital of the family annals became disconnected ; she paused to take off and rub her eyeglasses and presently asked, in extenuated tones, if this were the usual path to the laurel.

" It's the one I always take, dear Mrs. Potts ; it's the one I wanted Sir Basil to see, it's so far the lovelier. One gets the most wonderful, steep views down into far depths of blue." Imogen, perched like a slender Valkyrie on the summit of a crag above, thus addressed her perturbed friend.

She couldn't, really, but be amused by Mrs. Potts' pertinacity, for, not yet relinquishing her purpose, she continued—in silence now, her lips compressed, her forehead beaded with moisture—to scale the difficult way, showing a resolute nimbleness amazing in one so ill-formed for feats of agility. Sir Basil gave her a succouring hand while Imogen soared ahead, confident of the moment when Mrs. Potts, perforce, must fall back.

" Tiresome woman ! " she thought, but she couldn't help smiling while she thought it and heard Mrs. Potts' deep breath labouring up behind her. It was, perhaps, rather a shame to balk her in this way, but after all she was to have a full fortnight of Sir Basil, and she,

Imogen, felt that on this day, the day of a new friendship, Sir Basil's claim on her was paramount. She had something for him, a light, a strengthening, and she must keep the hour sacred to that stir of awakening. Among the pines and laurels she would say a few more words of help to him. So that Mrs. Potts must be made to go.

The moment came. A shoulder of rock overhung the way and the only passage was over its almost perpendicular surface. Imogen, as if unconscious of difficulty, with a stride, a leap, a swift clutch of her firm white hand, was at the top, smiling down at them and saying: "Now here the view is our very loveliest. One looks down for miles."

"But—my dear Imogen—is there no other way, round it perhaps?" Mrs. Potts looked desperately into the thick underbrush on either side.

"No other way," said Imogen. "But you can manage it. This is only the beginning—there's some real climbing further on. Put your foot where I did—no, higher—near the little fern—your hand there, look, do you see? Take a firm hold of that, then a good spring, and here you are."

Poor Mrs. Potts laid a faltering hand on the high ledge that was only a first stage in the chamois-like feat, and Imogen saw unwilling relinquishment in her eye.

"I don't see as I can do it," she murmured, relapsing, in her distress, into a helpless vernacular.

"Oh yes, this is nothing. Sir Basil will give you a push. I'll pull you and he will push you," Imogen, with kindest solicitude, suggested.

"Oh, I don't see as I *can*," Mrs. Potts repeated, looking rather wild at the vision of such a push. She

didn't at all lend herself to pushes and yet, facing even the indignities of that method, she did, though faltering, place herself in position, did lay a desperate hold on the high ledge, place her small, fat, tightly buttoned foot high beside the fern, allow Sir Basil, with a hand under each arm-pit, kindly to count—"One—two—three—now for it!", did even, at the word of command, make a passionate jump, only to lose hold, scrape lamentably down the surface of the rock and collapse into his arms.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" said Imogen, looking down upon them, while Sir Basil placed Mrs. Potts upon her feet and while Mrs. Potts, angered almost to tears, rubbed with her handkerchief at the damage done to her dress. "I'm so *very* sorry, dear Mrs. Potts. I see that it is a little too steep for you. And I did so want you to see this view."

"I shall have to go back. I am very tired, quite exhausted," said Mrs. Potts, in a voice that slightly shook. "I wish you had taken the usual path. I never dreamed that we were setting out on such a—such a violent expedition."

"But this is my usual path," said Imogen, opening her eyes. "I've never found it hard. And I wanted you and Sir Basil to see my view. But, dear Mrs. Potts, let me go back with you. Sir Basil won't mind finding his way alone, I'm sure."

"Oh no, thanks. "No, I couldn't think of spoiling your walk. No, I will go back," and Mrs. Potts, turning away, began to retrace her steps.

"Be sure and lie down and rest; take a little nap before dinner," Imogen called after her.

Mrs. Potts disappeared and Imogen, when she and Sir Basil stood together on the fortunate obstacle,

said: "Poor, excellent creature. I *am* sorry. She is displeased with me. I ought to have remembered that this was too rough for her and taken the other path." Indeed she had felt rather guilty as Mrs. Potts' back, the ridge of its high stays strongly marked by the slanting sunlight, descended among the sylvan scenery.

"Yes, and she did so want to come, awfully keen on it," said Sir Basil; "but I hope you won't think me very brutal if I confess that *I'm* not sorry. I want to talk to you, you see," Sir Basil beamed.

"I would rather talk to you too," Imogen smiled. "My good old friend can be very wearisome. But it was thoughtless of me to have brought her on this way."

They rested for a little while on their rock, looking down into the distance that was, indeed, worth any amount of climbing. And afterwards, when they reached the fairyland where the laurel drifted through the pine-woods, and as she quoted "Wood Notes" to him and pointed out to him the delicate splendours of the polished green, the clear, cold pink, on a background of grey rock, Imogen could but feel her little naughtiness well justified. It was delightful to be there in solitude with Sir Basil, and the sense of sympathy that grew between her and this supplanter of her father's was strange but not unsweet. It wasn't only that she could help him, and that that was always a claim to which one must respond, but she liked helping him.

On the downward way, a little tired from the rapidity of her ascent, she often gave her hand to Sir Basil as she leaped from rock to rock, and they smiled at each other without speaking, already like the best of friends.

That evening, as she was going down to dinner, Imogen met her mother on the stairs. They spoke little to each other during these days. Imogen felt that her neutrality of attitude could best be maintained by silence.

"Mrs. Potts came back," her mother said, smiling a little, and, Imogen fancied, with the old touch of timidity that she remembered in her. "She said that you took her on a most fearful climb."

"What foolishness, poor dear Mrs. Potts! I took her along the upper path."

"The upper path? Is there an upper path?" Mrs. Upton descended beside her daughter. "I thought that it was the usual path that had proved too much for her."

"I wanted them to see the view from the rock," said Imogen; "I forgot that poor Mrs. Potts would find it too difficult a climb."

"Oh, I remember, now, the rock. That is a difficult climb," said Mrs. Upton.

Imogen wondered if her mother guessed why Mrs. Potts had been taken on it. She must feel it of good augury, if she did, that her daughter should already like Sir Basil enough to indulge in such an uncharitable freak. Imogen felt her colour rise a little as she suspected herself and her motives revealed. It was not that she wasn't quite ready to own to a friendship with Sir Basil; but she didn't want friendship to be confused with condonation, and she didn't like her mother to guess that she could use Mrs. Potts uncharitably. She didn't like to see it in herself, that she could.

CHAPTER XIX

HER magnanimity towards Jack—so Imogen more and more clearly saw it to have been—at the time of their parting had made it inevitable that he should hold to his engagement to visit them that summer, and even because of that magnanimity she felt, in thinking over again and again the things that Jack had said of her and to her, a deepening of the cold indignation that the magnanimity had quelled at the moment of his speaking them. Mingling with the sense of snapped and bleeding ties was a longing —irrepressible, profound, violent—that he might be humiliated, punished, brought to his knees in penitence and abasement.

Her friendship with Sir Basil, his devotion to her, must be, though by no means humiliating, something of a coal of fire laid on Jack's traitorous head, and she saw at once that he was pleased, touched, but perplexed, by what must seem to him an unforeseen smoothing of her mother's path. He was there, she guessed, far more to see that her mother's path was made smooth than to try and straighten out their own twisted and separated ways. He had come for her mother, not for her, and Imogen did not know whether in realizing this she felt more pain or anger.

What puzzled him, what must puzzle her mother, must puzzle, indeed, any one who perceived it—except,

no doubt, the innocent Sir Basil himself—was that this friendship took up most of Sir Basil's time.

To Sir Basil she stood for something lofty and exquisite that did not, of course, clash with more rudimentary if deeper affections, but that, perforce, made them stand aside for the little interlude where it soared and sang. There was, for Imogen, a sharp sweetness in this fact and in Jack's bewildered appreciation of it, though for her own consciousness the triumph, if sweet, was hardly satisfying. After all, of what use was it to soar and sing if Sir Basil were to drop to earth so inevitably and so soon? Outwardly, at all events, this unforeseen change in the situation gave her all the advantage in her meeting with Jack. She was not the reproved and isolated creature that he might have expected to find. She was not the helpless girl, subjugated by an alien mother and cast off by a faithless lover. No; calm, benignant, lovely, she had turned to other needs; she was not helpless, she was giving help; she was looked up to, she could not be small.

Under her calm was the lament; under her unfaltering smile, the loneliness and the burning of that bitter indignation; but Jack could not guess at that, and if both felt difficulty in the neatly balanced friendship pledged under the wistaria, if there was a breathlessness for both in the tight-rope performance—where one false step might lead to open hostility, or else, who knew, into complete surrender—it was Imogen who gained composure from Jack's nervousness; and while he walked the rope with a fluttering breath and an anxious eye, she herself could show the most graceful slides and posturings in mid air.

It was evident enough to everybody that their

relation was changed, precarious; but all the appearance of danger was Jack's side alone.

Imogen, while she swung and balanced, often found her mother's eye fixed on her with a deep preoccupation, and guessed that it was owing to her mother's tactics that most of her *tête-à-têtes* with Jack were due. Her poor mother might imagine that she thus secured the solid foundation of the earth for their footsteps, but Imogen knew that never was the rope so dizzily swung as when she and Jack were thus gently coerced into solitude together.

It was, however, a few days after Jack's arrival and a few days before the Potts' departure that an interest came to her of such an absorbing nature that it wrapped her mind away from the chill or scorching sense of her own wrongs. It was with the Potts that the plan originated, and though the Potts were proving more trying than they had ever been, they caught some of the radiance of their own proposal. As instruments in a great purpose she could look upon them more patiently, though, more than ever, it would need tact to prevent them from shadowing the brightness they offered. The plan, apparently, had been with them for some time, its disclosure delayed until the moment suited to its seriousness and sanctity, and it was then, between the three, mapped out and discussed carefully before they felt it ripe for further publicity. Then it was Imogen who told them that the time had come for the unfolding of it to her mother, and Imogen who led them, on a sunny afternoon, into her mother's little sitting-room, where she sat writing at her desk.

Jack was there, reading near the window that opened upon the verandah, but his presence was not one to make the occasion less intimate and Imogen

was glad of it. It was well that he should be a witness of what she felt to be a confession of faith, a confession that needed explicit defining, a faith that he and all the others by common consent seemed banded together to ignore.

So, with something of the air of a lovely verger, she led her primed pair into the room and pointed out two chairs to them.

Valerie, in her thin black draperies, looked pale and jaded. She turned from her desk, keeping her pen in her hand, and Imogen detected a certain impatience in her eye as it rested upon the Potts.

Tison, suddenly awaking, broke into passionate barking; from the moment of his arrival he had shown a pronounced aversion towards Mr. Potts. He backed under the safe refuge of his mistress' chair, and his sharp hostility disturbed the ceremonious entrance."

"Please put the dog out, Jack," said Imogen; "we have a very serious matter to talk over with Mamma. But Valerie, stooping, caught him up, keeping a soothing hand on his still defiant head, while Mr. Potts began to speak.

The wonderful purpose, the wonderful project, was that Mr. Potts, aided by Imogen, should write the life of the late Mr. Upton, and, as the curtain was drawn from before the shrined intention, Imogen saw that her mother flushed deeply.

"His name must not be allowed to die from among us, Mrs. Upton. His ideals must become more widely the ideals of his countrymen." Mr. Potts, crossing his legs and throwing back his shoulders, wrapped one hand, while he spoke, in a turn of his flowing beard. "They are in crying need of such a message now, when the tides of social materialism and political

corruption are at their height. We may well say, to paraphrase the great poet's words, 'Upton! thou shouldst be living at this hour; New York hath need of thee.' And this need is one that it is our duty, and our high privilege, to satisfy." Mr. Potts' eye, heavy with its responsibility, dwelt on Valerie's downcast face. "No one, I may say it frankly, Mrs. Upton, is more fitted than I to satisfy that need and to hand on that message. No one had more opportunity than I for understanding that radiant personality in its public aspects. No one can feel more deeply than I that duty and that privilege. Every American child should know the name of Upton; every American man and woman should count him among the prophets of his generation. He did not ask for fame and we, his followers, ask none for him. No marble temple, no effulgent light of stained glass—no. But the violets and lilies of childhood laid upon his grave; the tearful, yet joyous whisper of those who come to share his spirit: 'I, too, am of his race. I, too, can with him strive and with him achieve.'" Mr. Potts' voice had risen and Tison responded with a couple of hoarse, checked barks.

Imogen, though reared on verbal bombast, had found some difficulty in maintaining her expression of uplifted approbation while Mr. Potts' rhetoric rolled; her willingness that Mr. Potts should serve the cause did not blind her to his inadequacy unless kept under the most careful control, and now, though incensed by Tison's interjection, she felt it as something of a relief, seizing the opportunity of Mr. Potts' momentary confusion to suggest, in a gentle and guarded voice: "You might tell Mamma now, Mr. Potts, how we want her to help us."

"I am coming to that, Miss Imogen," said Mr. Potts, with a drop from sonority to dryness; "I was approaching that point when the dog interrupted me;" and Mr. Potts cast a very venemous glance upon Tison.

"Had not the dog better be removed, Mrs. Upton?" Mrs. Potts, under her breath, murmured, leaning, as if in a pew and above prayer-books, forward in her chair. But Mrs. Upton seemed deaf to the suggestion.

Mr. Potts cleared his throat and resumed somewhat tersely: "This is our project, Mrs. Upton, and we have come this afternoon to ask you for your furtherance in it. You, of course, can provide me and Miss Imogen with many materials, inaccessible otherwise, for this our work of love. Early letters to you, early photographs, reminiscences of his younger days, and so on. Any suggestion as to the form and scope of the book we will be glad, very glad, to consider."

Valerie had listened without a word or gesture, her pen still held in one hand, Tison pressed to her by the other, as she sat sideways to the writing-table. Imogen read in her face a mingled embarrassment and dis-displeasure.

"I'm sure we must all be very grateful to Mr. Potts for this great idea of his, Mamma dear," she said. "I thought of it, of course, as soon as Papa died; I knew that we all owed it—to him, and to the country that he loved and served so well; but I did not see my way, and have not seen it till now. I've so little technical knowledge. But now I shall contribute a little memoir to the biography and, in any other way, give Mr. Potts all the aid I can. And we hope that you will, too. Papa's name is one that must not be allowed to fade."

"I would rather talk of this at some other time, and

with Mr. Potts alone," Valerie now said, not raising her eyes.

"But, Mamma, this is my work, too. I must be present when it is talked of."

"No, Jack, don't go," said Valerie, looking up at the young man, who had made a movement as if to rise. "You and I, Imogen, will speak of this together, and I will find an hour, later, when I will be free to talk to Mr. Potts."

"Mamma darling," said Imogen, masking her rising anger in patient playfulness, "you are a lazy, postponing person. You are not a bit busy and this is just the time to talk it over with us all. Of course Jack must stay; we want his advice, too, severe critic as we know him to be. Come, dear, put down that pen." She bent over her and drew the pen from her hand, while Mr. Potts watched the little scene, old suspicions clouding his countenance.

"My time is limited, Mrs. Upton," he observed; "Mrs. Potts and I take our departure to-morrow and, if I have heard aright, you expect acquaintances to dinner. Therefore, if you will pardon me, I must ask you to let us have the benefit, here and now, of your suggestions."

Valerie had not responded by any smile to Imogen's rather baleful lightness, nor did she, by any penitence of look, respond to Mr. Potts' urgency. She sat silent for a moment and when she spoke it was in a changed voice, dulled, monotonous. "If you insist on my speaking, now—and openly—I must say to you that I altogether disapprove of your project. You will never," said Valerie, with a rising colour, "gain my consent to it."

A heavy silence followed her words, the only sound

that of Tison's faint sniffings, as, his nose outstretched and moving from side to side, he cautiously savoured the air in Mr. Potts' direction. Mrs. Potts stirred slightly, and uttered a sharp, "Tht—tht." Mr. Potts, his hand still stayed in his beard, gazed from under the fringed pent-house of his brows with an arrested, bovine look.

It was Imogen who broke the silence. Standing beside her mother she had felt the shock of a curious fulfilment go through her, as if she had almost expected to hear what she now heard. She mastered her voice to ask—

"We must demand your reasons for this—this very strange attitude, Mamma."

Her mother did not raise her eyes. "I don't think that your father was a man of sufficient distinction to justify the publishing of his biography."

At this Mr. Potts breathed a deep, indignant volume of sound, louder than a sigh, less articulate than a groan, through the forests of his beard.

"Sufficient distinction, Mrs. Upton! Sufficient distinction! You evidently are quite ignorant of how great was the distinction of your late husband. Ask us what that distinction was—ask any of his large circle of friends. It was a distinction not of mind only, nor of birth and breeding—though that was of the highest that this country has fostered—but it was distinction also of soul and spirit. Your husband, Mrs. Upton, fought with speech and pen the iniquities of his country, the country that, as Miss Imogen has said, he loved and served. He served, he loved, with mind and heart and hand. He was the moving spirit in all the great causes of his day, the vitalizing influence that poured faith and will-power into them. He

founded the co-operative community of Clackville; he organized the society of the 'Doers' among our young men; he was a patron of the arts; talent was fostered, cheered on its way by him; I can speak personally of three young friends of mine—noble boys—whom he sent to Paris at his own expense for the study of music and painting; when the great American picture is painted, the great American symphony composed, it will be, in all probability, to your husband that the country will stand indebted for the unveiling of its power. And above all, Mrs. Upton, above all"—Mr. Potts' voice dropped to a thunderous solemnity—"his character, his personality, his spirit, were as a light shining in darkness to all who had the good fortune to know him, and that light cannot, shall not, be cribbed, cabined and confined to a merely private capacity. It is a public possession and belongs to his country and to his age."

Tison, all unheeded now, had leapt to the floor and, during this address, had stood directly in front of the speaker barking furiously, until Imogen, her lips compressed, her forehead flushed, stooped, picked him up and flung him out of the room.

Mrs. Upton had sat quite motionless, only lifting her glance now and then to Mr. Potts' shaking beard and flashing eye. And, after another pause, in which only Mr. Potts' deep breathing was heard and the desperate scratching at the door of the banished Tison, she said in sombre tones: "I think you forget, Mr. Potts, that I was never one of my husband's appreciators. I am sorry to be forced to recall this fact to your memory."

It had been in all their memories, of course, a vague, a hovering uncertainty, a dark suspicion that one put

aside and would not look at. But to have it now placed before them, and in these cold, these sombre tones, was to receive an icy douche of reality, to be convicted of over-ready hope, over-generous confidence.

It was Imogen again who found words for the indignant deputation.

"Is that lamentable fact any reason why those who do appreciate him should not share their knowledge with others?"

"I think it is; I hope so, Imogen," her mother replied, not raising her eyes to her.

"You tell us that your own ignorance and blindness is to prevent us from writing my father's life?"

"My opinion of your father's relative insignificance is, I think, a sufficient reason."

"Do you quite realize the arrogance of that attitude?"

"I accept all the responsibility for it, Imogen."

"But *we* cannot accept it in you," said Imogen, her voice sinking to the hard quiver of reality that Jack well knew. "*We* can't fail in our duty to him because you have always failed in yours. *We* are in no way bound to consider you—who never considered him."

"Imogen," said her mother, raising her eyes with a look of command, "you forget yourself. Be still."

Imogen's face froze to stone. Such words, such a look, she had never met before. She stood silent, helpless, rage and despair at her heart. But Mr. Potts did not lag behind his duty. His hand still wrapped, Moses-like, in his beard, his eyes bent in holy wrath upon his hostess, he rose to his feet and Mrs. Potts, in recounting the scene—one of the most thrilling of her life—always said that never had she seen Delancy so superbly *true*, never had she seen blood so *tell*.

"I must say to you, Mrs. Upton, with the deepest pain," he said, "that I agree with Miss Imogen. I must inform you, Mrs. Upton, that you have no right, legal, or moral, to bind us by your own shortcoming. Miss Imogen and I may do our duty without your help or consent."

"I have nothing more to say to you, Mr. Potts," Valerie replied. She had unseeingly taken up her pen again, and, with a gesture habitual to her, was drawing squares and crosses on the blotter under her hand. The lines trembled. The angles of the squares would not meet.

"But I have still something to say to you, Mrs. Upton," said Mr. Potts. "I have still to say to you that, much as you have shocked and pained us in the past, you have never so shocked and pained us as now. We had hoped for better things in you, wider lights, deeper insights, the unsealing of your eyes to error and wrong in yourself; we had hoped that sorrow would work its sacred discipline and that, with your daughter's hand to guide you, you were preparing to follow, from however far a distance, in the footsteps of him who is gone. This must count for us always as a dark day of life, when we have seen a human soul turn wilfully from the good held out to it and choose deliberately the evil. I speak for myself and for Mrs. Potts—and in sorrow rather than in wrath, Mrs. Upton. I say nothing of your daughter; I bow my head before that sacred filial grief, I——" But here, suddenly, quiet, swift, irresistible as a flame, Jack rose from his place. It seemed one suave, unbroken motion, that by which he laid a hand on Mr. Potts' shoulder, a hand on Mrs. Potts' shoulder—she had risen in wonder and alarm at the menacing descent upon her lord—laid a hand on

each, swept them to the door, opened it, swept them out, and shut the door upon them. Then he turned and leaned upon it, his arms folded.

"Perhaps, Jack, you wish to put me out, too," said Imogen in a voice of ice and fire. "Your arguments are conclusive. I hope that Mamma approves her champion."

"She needs one," Jack replied.

Valerie now seemed to lean heavily on the table; she rested her forehead on her hand, covering her eyes.

"Have you anything to say to me, Mamma, before Jack executes his justice on me?" Imogen asked.

"Spare me, Imogen," her mother answered.

"Have you spared *me*?" said Imogen. "Have you spared my father? What right have you to ask for mercy? You are a cruel, a shallow, a selfish woman, and you break my heart as you broke his. Now, Jack, you need not put me out, I will go of myself."

When Jack had closed the door on her he still stood leaning against it at a distance from Valerie. He saw that she wept, bitterly and uncontrollably, but at first, awed by her grief, he did not dare approach her. It was only when the sobs were quieter that he went and stood near her.

"You were right, right," he almost whispered.

She did not answer and wept on as if there could be no consolation for her in such rightness.

"It had to come," said Jack. "She had to be made to understand. And you are right."

She was not thinking of herself. "Oh, Jack, Jack"—putting out her hand to his she grasped it tightly—"how I have hurt her. Poor Imogen; my poor, poor child."

CHAPTER XX

IMOGEN hardly knew where she went, or how, when she left her mother—her mother and Jack —and darted from the house on the wings of a supreme indignation, a supreme despair. Her sense of fitness was not that of Mr. Potts, and she knew her father's biography was doomed. Against her mother's wish it could not, with any grace, any dignity, be published. Mr. Potts would put forth an appreciation of his departed chief in the small, grandiloquent review to which he contributed—he had only delayed because of the greater project—but such a tribute would be a sealing of public failure rather than the kindling of public recognition. Already, by that larger public, her father was forgotten. Mr. Potts would not make him remembered.

The word—forgotten—seemed like the beat of dark, tragic wings bearing her on and on. The fire of a bitter wrong burned in her. And it was not the sense of personal wrong—though that was fierce—that made her flight so blind and headlong. It was this final, this culminating wrong to her father. His face rose before her, while she fled, the deep, dark eyes dwelling with persistence on her as though they asked—she

seemed to hear the very words and in his very voice—"What have they done to me, little daughter? Did I deserve this heaping of dust upon my name—and from her hands?"

For it was that. Dust, the dust of indifferent time, of cold-hearted oblivion, was drifting over him, hiding his smile, his eyes, his tears. It seemed to mount, to suffocate her, as she ran, this dust, strewn by her mother's hand. Her own heart had been parched by the fall of it: she had known that crouching doubts, not of him—never of him—but of his greatness, had lurked in ambush since her mother had come home; known that the Potts had never before been so clearly seen for the little that they were since her mother—and all that her mother had brought—had come into her life. And, before this drifting of dust upon her faith in her father's greatness, her heart, all that was deepest in it, broke into a greater trust, a greater love, He was not great, perhaps, as the world counted greatness; but he was good, good—he was sorrowful and patient. He loved her, as no one had ever loved her. His ideals were hers and her love was his. Dust might lie on his tomb, but never, never, in her heart.

"Ah, it's cruel! cruel! cruel!" she panted, as she ran, ran, up the rocky, woodland path, leaping from ledge to ledge, slipping on the silky moss, falling now and then on hands and knees, but not pausing or faltering until she reached the murmuring pine-woods, the grassy, aromatic glades where the mountain-laurel grew.

Pallid, dishevelled, with tragic, unseeing eyes and parted lips—the hollowed eyes, the sorrowful lips of a classic mask—she rushed from the shadows of the

mountain-path into this place of sunlight and solitude. A doomed, distraught Antigone.

And so she looked to Sir Basil, who, his back against a warm rock, a cigarette in one lazy hand, was outstretched there before her on the moss, a bush of flowering laurel at his head, and, at his feet, beyond tree-tops, the steep, far blue of the lower world. He was gazing placidly at this view, empty of thought and even of conscious appreciation, wrapped in a balmy contentment, when, with the long, deep breath of a hunted deer, Imogen leaped from darkness into light, and her face announced such disaster that, casting aside the cigarette, springing to his feet, he seized her by the arms, thinking that she might fall before him. And indeed she would have cast herself face downwards on the grass had he not been there, and she leaned forward on his supporting hands, speechless, breathing heavily, borne down by the impetus of her headlong chase. Then, her face hidden from him as she leaned, she burst into sobs.

"Miss Upton!—Imogen!—My dear child!" said Sir Basil, in a crescendo of distress and solicitude.

She leaned there on his hands weeping so bitterly and so helplessly that he finished his phrase by putting an arm around her and so more effectually supporting her, so satisfying, also, his own desire to comfort and caress her.

The human touch, the human tenderness—though him she hardly realized—drew her grief to articulateness. "Oh—my father!—my father!—Oh—what have they done to you!" she gasped, leaning her forehead against Sir Basil's shoulder.

"Your father?" Sir Basil repeated soothingly, since this departed personality seemed a menace

that might easily be dealt with. "What is it? What have they done? How can I help you? My dear child, do treat me as a friend. Do tell me what is the matter."

"It's Mamma! Mamma!—she has broken my heart—as she broke his," sobbed Imogen, finding her former words, Already, such was the amazing irony of events, Sir Basil seemed, more than any one in the world, to take that dead father's place, to help her in her grief over him. The puzzle of it inflicted a deeper pang. "I can't tell you," she sobbed. "But I can never, never forgive her!"

"Forgive your mother?" Sir Basil repeated, shocked. "Don't, I beg of you, speak so. It's some misunderstanding."

"No!—No! It is understanding— it is the whole understanding! It has come out at last—the truth—the dreadful truth."

"But can't you tell me? can't you explain?"

She lifted her face and drew away from him as she said, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes. "You never knew him. You cannot care for him—no one who cares, as much as you do, for her, can ever care for him."

Sir Basil had deeply flushed. He led her to the sunny rock and made her sit down on a low ledge, where she leaned forward, her face in her hands, long sighs of exhaustion succeeding her tears.

"I know nothing about your father, as you say, and I do care, very much, for your mother," said Sir Basil after a little while. "But I care for you, very much, too,"

"Ah, but you could never care for me so much as to think her wrong."

" I don't know about that. Why not ?—if she is wrong. One often thinks people one is fond of very wrong. Do you know," and Sir Basil now sat down beside her, a little lower, on the moss, " do you know you'll make me quite wretched if you won't have confidence in me. I really can't stand seeing you suffer and not know what it's about. I don't—I can't feel myself such a stranger as that. Won't you think of me," he took one of her hands and held it as he said this, " won't you think of me as, well, as a sort of affectionate old brother, you know. I want to be trusted, and to see if I can't help you. Don't be afraid," he added, " of being disloyal—of making me care less, you know, for your mother, by anything you say ; for you wouldn't."

Leaning there, her face hidden, while she half heard him, it struck her suddenly, a shaft of light in darkness, that, indeed, he might help her.

She dropped her hands to look at him and, with all its tear-stained disfigurement, he thought that he had never seen anything more heavenly than that look. It sought, it sounded him, pleaded with and caressed him. And, with all its solemnity, there dawned in it a tenderness deeper than any that he had ever seen in her.

" I do trust you," she said, " I think of you as a near, a dear friend. And since you promise me that it will change you in nothing, I will tell you. I believe that perhaps you can help us—my father and me. You must count me with him, you know, always. We want to write a life of him, Mr. Potts and I. Mr. Potts—you may have seen it—is an ordinary person, ordinary but for one thing, one great and beautiful thing that Papa and I always felt in him—and that

beautiful thing is his depth of unselfish devotion to great causes and to good people. He worked for my father like a faithful, loving dog. He had an accurate knowledge of all the activities that Papa's life was given to—all the ideals it aimed at and attained—yes, yes, attained, whatever they may say. He has a very skilful pen, and is in touch with the public press. So, though I would, of course, have wished for a more adequate biographer, I was glad and proud to accept his offer; and I would have overlooked, revised, everything. We felt—and by we, I mean not only Mr. and Mrs. Potts, but all his many, many friends, all those whose lives he loved and helped and lifted—that we owed it to the world he served not to let his name fade from among us. You cannot dream, Sir Basil, of what sort of man my father was. His life was one long devotion to the highest things, one long service of the weak and oppressed, one long battle with the wrong. Those who are incapable of following him to the heights can give you no true picture of him. I will say nothing, in this respect, of Mamma, except that she could not follow him, and that she made him very, very unhappy, and with him, me. For I shared all his griefs. She left us; she laughed at all the things we cared and worked for. My father never spoke bitterly of her, his last words, almost, were for her, words of tenderness and pity and forgiveness. He had the capacity that only great souls have, of love for littler natures. I say this much so that you may know that any idea that you may have gathered of my father is, perforce, a garbled, a false one. He was a noble, a wonderful man. Everything I am I owe to him."

Imogen had straightened herself, the traces of

weeping almost gone, her own fluency, as was usual with her, quieting her emotion, even while her own and her father's wrongs, thus objectivized in careful phrases, made indignation at once colder and deeper. Her very effort to quell indignation, to command her voice to an even justice of tone before this lover of her mother's, gave it a resonant quality, curiously impressive. And, as she looked before her, down into the blue profundities, the sense of her own sincerity seemed to pulse back to her from her silent listener and filled her with a growing consciousness of power over him.

"This morning," she took up her theme on that resonant note, deepened to a tragic pitch, "we went to Mamma, Mr. Potts and I, to tell her of our project of commemoration, to ask her co-operation. We wanted to be very generous with her, to take her help and her sympathy for granted. I should have felt it an insult to my mother had I told Mr. Potts that we must carry on our work without consulting her. She received us with cold indifference. She tried not to listen, when she heard what our errand was. And her indifference became hostility when she understood. All her old hatred for what he was and meant, all her fundamental antagonism to the purpose of his life—and to him—came at last, openly, to the light. She was forced to reveal herself. Not only has she no love, no reverence for him, but she cannot bear that others should learn to love him and to reverence him. She sneered at his claim to distinction, she refused her consent to our project. It is a terrible thing for me to say—but I must—and you will understand me—you who will not care less for her because she is so wrong—what I feel most of all in her attitude is a childish, yet a cruel jealousy. She cannot endure that she should be

so put into the dark by the spreading of his light. The greater his radiance is shown to be, the more in the wrong will all her life be proved—it is that that she will not hear of. She *wants* him to be obscure, undistinguished, negligible, because it's that that she has always thought him."

Sir Basil, while she spoke, had kept his eyes downcast. Once or twice a dull colour rose to his sunburned cheek, but in his well-balanced mind was a steady perception of what the filial grief and pain must be from which certain words came. He could not resent them ; it was inevitable that a child who had so loved her father should so think and feel. And her self-control, her accurate fluency, answered with him for her sincerity as emotion could not have done, Passion would never carry this noble girl into overstatement. Fairness constrained him to admit, while he listened, that dark colour in his cheek, that her view of her father was more likely to be right than her mother's view. An unhappily married woman was seldom fair. Mrs. Upton had never mentioned her husband to him, never alluded to him except in most formal terms, but the fact of her flight from her home, the fact that he had made her so unhappy, had been to him sufficient evidence of Mr. Upton's general unworthiness. Now, though Imogen's tragic ardour did not communicate any of her faith in her father's wonder or nobility, it did convince him of past unfairness towards, no doubt, a most worthy man. Incompatibility, that had been the trouble : he, one of those reformer people, very much in earnest ; and Mrs. Upton, dear and lovely though she was, with not a trace of such enthusiasms in her moral make-up.

So, when Imogen had finished, though he sat silent for a little while, though, beneath the steady survey of what she put before him, was a stirring of trouble, it was in a tone of quiet acceptance that he at last said, looking up at her —" Yes, I quite see, what you feel about it. To you, of course, they must look like that, your mother's reasons. They must look very differently to her, that goes without saying. We can't really make out these things, you know, these fundamental antagonisms; I never knew it went as far as that. But I quite see. Poor child. I'm very sorry. It is most awfully hard on you."

" Don't think of me ! " Imogen breathed out on a note of pain. " It's not of myself I'm thinking, not of my humiliation and despair—but of him !—of him ! Is it *right* that I should submit ? *Ought* a project like ours to be abandoned for such a reason ? "

Again Sir Basil was silent for some moments. " Perhaps she'll come round—think better of it," he said at last.

" Ah ! " it was now on a note of deep, of tremulous hope that she breathed it out, looking into his eyes with the profound, searching look so moving to him. " Ah ! it's there, it's there, that you could help me. She would never yield to me. She might to you."

" Oh, I don't think that likely," Sir Basil protested, the flush darkening.

" Yes, yes," said Imogen, leaning towards him; " Yes, if anything is likely that is so. If hope is anywhere, it's there. Don't you see, in her eyes I stand for *him*. To yield to me would be like yielding to him, would be his triumph. That's what she can't forgive in me—that I do stand for him, that I live by all that

she rejected. She would never yield to me—but she might yield *for* you."

"Shall I speak to her about it?" Sir Basil asked abruptly, after another moment, in which Imogen's hand seized his tightly, its soft warm fingers more potent in appeal than even her eyes had been. And now, again, she leaned towards him, her eyes inundating him with radiant trust and gratitude.

"Will you?—Oh, will you?—dear Sir Basil."

Sir Basil stammered a little. "I'll have a try. It's hard on you, I think. I don't see why you shouldn't have your heart's desire. It's an awfully queer thing to do—but, for your sake, I'll have a try—put it to her, you know."

"Ah, I *knew* that you were big," said Imogen.

He looked at her, his hand between her hands. The flowering laurel was behind her head. The pine-forest murmured about them. The sky was blue above them and the deep blue of the distance lay at their feet. Suddenly, as they looked into each other's eyes, it dawned in the consciousness of both that something was happening.

It was to Sir Basil that it was happening. Imogen's was but the consciousness of his experience. Such a thing could hardly happen to Imogen. Neither her senses, nor her emotions, nor her imagination played any dominant part in her nature. She was incapable of falling in love in the helpless, head-long, human fashion that the term implies. But though such feeling lacked, the perception of it in others was swift and while she leaned to Sir Basil in the sunlight, while she clasped his hand, while their eyes dwelt deeply on each other, she seemed to hear, like a rising chime of wonder and delight, the ringing of herald

bells that sang—"Mine—mine—mine—if I choose to take him."

Wonderful indeed it was to feel this influx of certain power. Sunlight, like that about them, seemed to rise, slowly, softly, within her, like the upwelling of a spring of joy.

It was happening, it had happened to him, his eyes told her that, but whether he knew as she did she doubted and, for the beautiful moment, it added a last touch of charm to her exultation to know that, while she was sure, she could leave that light veil of his wonder shimmering between them. With the vision of the unveiling her mind leaped to the thought of her mother and of Jack and with that thought came a swift pulse of vengeful gladness. So she would make answer to them both—the scorner—the rejecter. Not for a moment must she listen to the voices of petty doubts and pities. This love, that lay like a bauble in her mother's hand—an unfit ornament for her years—would shine on her own head like a diadem. Unasked, undreamed of, it had turned to her; it was her highest duty to keep and wear it. It was far, far more than her duty to herself; it was her duty to this man, finished, mature, yet full of unawakened possibility; it was her duty to that large, vague world that his life touched, a world where her young faiths and vigours would bring a light such as her mother's gay little taper could never spread. These thoughts and others, flashed through Imogen's mind, with the swiftness and exactitude of a drowning vision. Yet, after the long moment of vivid realization, it was at its height that a qualm, a sinking overtook her. The gift had come, of that she was sure. But its triumphant display might be delayed, nay, might

be jeopardized. Some perverse loyalty in his nature, some terrified decisiveness of action on her mother's part, and the golden reality might crumble. For one moment, as the qualm seized her, she saw herself—and the thought was like a flying flame that scorched her lips as it passed—she saw herself sweeping aside the veil, sinking upon his breast, with tears that would reveal him to himself—and her to him.

But it was impossible for Imogen to yield open-eyed to temptation. Her strong sense of personal dignity held her from the impulse and a quick recognition, too, that it might lower her starry altitude in his eyes. She must stand still, stand perfectly still, and he would come to her. She could protect him from her mother's clinging—this she recognized as a strange yet an insistent duty—but there must no shadow, no ambiguity, between her and him.

The radiance of the renunciation, the resolve, was in her face as she gently released his hand, gently rose, standing smiling, with a strange, rapt smile, above him.

Sir Basil rose too, silent, and looking hard at her. She guessed at the turmoil, the wonder of his honest soul, his fear lest she did guess it and, with the fear, the irrepressible hope that, in some sense, it was echoed.

"My dear, dear friend," she said, putting her hand on his shoulder, as though with the gesture she dubbed him her knight, "my more than friend—shall it be elder brother?—I believe that you will be able to help me and my father. And if you fail, my gratitude to you will be none the less great. I can't tell you how I trust you, how I care for you."

From his face she looked up at the sky above them and in the sunlight her innocent, uplifted smile made

her like a heavenly child. "Isn't it wonderful? beautiful?" she said, almost conquering her inner fear by the seeming what she wished to be. "Look up, Sir Basil. Doesn't it seem to heal everything, to glorify everything, to promise everything?"

He looked up at the sky, still speechless.

Her face, her smile—the sky above it—did it not heal, glorify, promise in its innocence? If a great thing makes a sudden claim, must not the lesser things inevitably go? Was it possible to hold them? Was it right to try to hold them? There was tumult in poor Sir Basil's soul.

But when everything culminated in the longing to *tell* her what he felt, a sturdy sense of honesty warned him that not so could he, with honour, go forward. He must see his way more clearly than that. Strange that he had been so blind, *till* now, of where all ways, since his coming to Vermont, had been leading him. He could see them now, plainly enough.

Taking Imogen's hand once more, he pressed it, dropped it, looked into her eyes and said, as they turned to the descent—"That was swearing eternal friendship, wasn't it?"

CHAPTER XXI

IT is wonderful how violent emotions may be effaced in highly civilized surroundings by the common effort of those who have learned how to live. Of these there were, perhaps, not many in our little group; but the guidance of such a mistress of the art as Imogen's mother steered the social craft, on this occasion, past the reefs and breakers into a tolerably smooth sea.

With an ally as facile, despite his personal perturbations, as Sir Basil; a friend like Mrs. Wake at hand, a friend to whom one had never to make explanations yet who always understood what was wanted of her; with a presence so propitious as the calm and unconscious Miss Bocock, the sickening plunges of explanation and recrimination that accompany unwary seafaring and unskilful seamanship were quite avoided in the time that passed between Valerie's appearance at the tea-table—where she dispensed refreshment to Mrs. Wake, Miss Bocock and Jack only—and the meeting of all the ship's crew at dinner.

Valerie, in that ominous interlude, even when Sir Basil appeared on the verandah alone, but saying that he had been for a walk with Miss Upton, who was tired and had gone to her room to rest, even when she observed that the Potts had decided upon maintaining a splendid isolation in their own chambers,

did not permit the ship to waver for one moment in its course. She had tea sent up to Imogen and tea sent up to the Potts, but no messages of any sort accompanied either perfectly appointed tray, and when the dinner hour arrived she faced the Potts' speechless dignity and Imogen's *mater dolorosa* eyelids with perfect composure.

She seemed, on meeting the Potts, neither to ignore nor to recall. She seemed to understand their speechlessness, yet to take it lightly, as if on their account. She talked at them, through them, with them, really, in such a manner that they were drawn helplessly into her shuttle and woven into the gracefully gliding pattern of social convention in spite of themselves. In fact she preserved appearances with such success that every one, to each one's surprise, was able to make an excellent dinner.

After high emotions, as after high seas, the appetite is capricious, shrinking to the shudder of repulsion or rising to whetted keenness. Valerie had the satisfaction of seeing that her crew, as they assured themselves—or, rather, as she assured them—that the waters were silken in their calm, showed the reaction from moral stress in wholesome sensuous gratification. Even Mrs. and Mr. Potts, even Imogen, were hungry.

She herself had still too strongly upon her the qualm of imminent shipwreck to do more than seem to join them; but it was only natural that the captain, who alone was conscious of just how near the reefs were and of just how threatening the horizon loomed, should lack the appetite that his reassuring presence evoked. Jack observed that she ate nothing, but no one else observed it.

It was perhaps Jack who was most observant at

that wonderful little dinner, where the shaded candle-light seemed to isolate the guests in its soft, diffused circle of radiance, and the windows, with their faintly stirring muslin curtains, to open on a warm, mysterious ocean of darkness. The others were too much occupied with their own particular miseries and in their own particular reliefs to notice how the captain fared.

Mrs. Wake must, no doubt, guess that something was amiss, but she couldn't in the least guess what. She watched, but her observation, her watchfulness could be in no sense like his own. Miss Bocock, in a low-cut blouse of guipure and pale-blue satin, her favourite red roses pinned on her shoulder, her fringe freshly and crisply curled above her eyeglasses, was the only quite unconscious presence, and so innocent was her unconsciousness that it could not well be observant. Indeed, in one sinking moment, she leaned forward, with unwonted kindliness, to ask the stony Mrs. Potts if her headache was better, a question answered by a sphinx-like bow. Apart, however, from her one or two blunders, Jack saw that Miss Bocock was very useful to Valerie; more useful than himself, on whom, he felt, her eye did not venture to rest for any length of time. Too tragic a consciousness would rise between them if their glances deeply intermingled. Miss Bocock's gaze, behind its crystal medium, was a smooth surface from which the light balls of dialogue rebounded easily. Miss Bocock thought that she had never talked so well upon her own topics as on this occasion, and from the intentness of the glances turned upon her she might well have been misled as to her effectiveness. The company seemed to thirst for every detail as to her theory of the rise of

the Mycenean civilization. Mrs. Wake, for all her tact, was too wary, too observant, to fill the part of buffer-state so perfectly as Miss Bocock filled it.

For pure amusement, with but the faintest tincture of pity to colour it, the countenances of the Potts might have been worth close study. That their silence was never for one moment allowed to become awkward, to themselves, or to others, Jack recognized as one of Valerie's miracles that night, and when he considered that the Potts might not guess to whom they owed their ease, he could hardly pity them. That their eyes should not meet his, except for a heavy stare or two, was natural. After this meeting in the mirage-like oasis that Valerie made bloom for them all, he knew that for the Potts he would be relegated to the sightless, soundless Sahara of a burning remembrance. He noted that Mr. Potts was very uplifted, Mrs. Potts very tense, and that Mrs. Potts' dress, as if in protest against any form of relaxation and condonation, was very high and tight. Indeed Mrs. Potts, in her room, before the descent, had said to her husband, in the mutual tones of their great situation, laying aside with resolution the half-high bodice that till then had marked her concession to fashionable standards: "Never, never again, in her house. Let her bare her bosom if she will, by every symbol I shall protest against her."

Mr. Potts, with sombre justice, as though he exonerated an Aggripina from one of many crimes, had remarked that the bosom, so far as he had observed it, had been slightly veiled; but——

"I understand those tuckers," Mrs. Potts had replied with a withering smile, presenting her back for her

husband to hook, a marital office that usually left Mr. Potts in an exhausted condition. So Mrs. Potts this evening seemed at once to mourn, to protest and to accuse, covered to her chin with a relentless black.

But though Jack saw all this, he wasn't in the humour for more than a superficial sense of amusement. Below his excited sense of mirth was a deeper sense of disaster, and the poor Potts were at once too grotesque and too insignificant to count for it.

It was upon Imogen and Sir Basil that his eye most frequently turned. Valerie had put them together, separated from herself by the whole length of the table; Mrs. Potts was on Imogen's other hand; Miss Bocock sat between Mr. Potts and Valerie, and Jack, Mrs. Wake and Mrs. Potts brought the circle round to Sir Basil, a neat gradation of affinities.

Jack, in a glance, had seen that Imogen had been passionately weeping; he could well imagine that grief. But before her pallid face and sunken eyes he knew that his heart was hardened. Never, judged from a dispassionate standard, had Imogen been so right; and her rightness left him indifferent. If she had been wrong, if she had been, in some sense guilty, if her consciousness had not been so supremely spotless, he would have been sorrier for her. It was for the woman beside him that his heart was aching. Imogen he seemed to survey from across a far, wide chasm of alienation.

Sir Basil was evidently as bent on helping her as was her mother. He talked very gaily, tossing back all Valerie's balls. He rallied Miss Bocock on her radical tendencies and engaged in a humorous dispute with Mrs. Wake in defence of racing. Imogen, when he spoke, turned her eyes on him and listened gravely;

when her mother spoke, she looked down at her plate. But once or twice Jack caught her eye, while her mother's attention was engaged elsewhere, resting upon her with a curious, a piercing intentness. Such a cold glitter, as of steel, was in the glance, that, instinctively, he looked at Valerie, as if he had felt her threatened.

This instinct of protection was oddly on the watch to-night. Under the sense of mirth and disaster a deeper thing throbbed in him, some inarticulate sorrow, greater than the apparent causes warranted, that mourned with her and for her. Illuminated by his intuition Valerie, he thought, had never been so lovely as to-night. Her body, with its indolence of aspect, seemed to him to express an almost superhuman courage. She was soft and fragile and weary, leaning there in her transparent blacks, her cheek in her hand, her elbow, in its loose sleeve, resting on the table ; but she made him think of a reed that the tempest could not break.

Her face was pale ; he had never seen it so drained of its dusky rose. There was something inexpressibly touching in the flicker of her smile on the white cheek, in the innocent gaiety of the dimple, placed high and recalling Japanese suggestions, vague as the scent of sandal-wood. She, too, had wept, as he well knew, and his heart ached dully as he thought of that bitter weeping, those tears of humility and pain. Her eyelids, strangely discoloured, were like the petals of a melancholy flower and her eyes heavy and gentle.

A vague, absurdly alarming sense of presage grew upon him as his eyes went from this face to Imogen's, so still, so cold, so unanswering, lightened, as if from a veil of heavy cloud, by that stealthy, baleful, illu-

minating glance. In Imogen's whole bearing he read renouncement ; but renouncement, in her hand, would assuredly prove a scourge for her mother's shoulders. For the time that they must be together, she and her mother, her sense of her own proved rightness would be relentless, and as relentless her sense of bitter wrong. Valerie's shoulders were bared and bowed. She was ready to take it all. But it was here, for Jack, that the deep instinct of protection centred at last in a clear decision, it was here that he felt himself rush in with the only solution, the only salvation. At the thought of it, that one solution, his heart ached more sharply, but it ached for himself alone. For she must go away ; yes, that was the only escape : she must go away at once, with Sir Basil. She had failed. She had said it to him that morning in a few broken sentences before, relinquishing the hand she grasped, she smiled piteously upon him and left him. "I've done more than fail—I've wrecked things."

He knew her meaning and that she spoke of the disaster that, as she had seen, finally and irrevocably, had overtaken his love for her child.

And it was true, of course. She had failed ; she had wrecked things ; but, in his eyes, the failure she bore, the destruction she brought, made others dark, not her. She must accept the irony of things—it was not on her that its shadow rested—and she must go, back to her own place, back to her own serene if saddened sunlight, where she could breathe again and be safe. Thank Heaven for Sir Basil, was Jack's thought over that sharpened ache. And it was with this thought that, for Jack, came the first sinister whisper, the whisper that, as suddenly as the hiss of a viper trodden upon in the grass, warned him of the

fulfilment—clear, startling, unimaginable—of all dim presages.

He always remembered, ludicrously, that they had reached the sweet when the whisper came, and with his recollection of its import there mingled for him always the incongruous association of sliced peaches and iced cream. He had just helped himself to this dish when, raising his eyes, he saw Sir Basil looking at Imogen.

It was apparently a calm, a thoughtful look, and as Imogen's eyes were downcast to her fruit and cream, which she was eating with much appetite, she did not then meet it. But it was a look a little off-guard—his perception of that was the first low sibilant that reached him—it was a look full of gentle solicitude, full of brooding, absorbed intentness; and, presently, when Imogen, as if aware of it, glanced up and met it, Sir Basil flushed deeply and turned his eyes away.

This passage was insignificant. There was no reason why he should suddenly grow chilly; Jack tried to tell himself that, as he mechanically went on eating. Perhaps Imogen had confided in Sir Basil; perhaps he agreed with her, was sorry, sympathetic, and embarrassed by a sympathy that set him against the woman he loved; perhaps he already felt a protecting, paternal affection for Imogen, just as he himself, in the absurd inversions of their situation, felt a protecting filial affection for Valerie. But at that thought, as if the weak links of his chain of possibilities had snapped and left him at the verge of a chasm, a sudden echo in himself revealed depths of disastrous analogy. It was revelation that came to Jack rather than self-revelation; the instinct that flamed up in him at this moment was like a torch in a cavern. He might

have seen the looming shapes fairly well without it, but, by its illumination, every uncertainty started out into vivid light and dark. The fact that his own feeling was so far other than filial did not detain him. His light was not turned upon himself; of himself he only knew, in the dazzling moment, that he was armed as her knight, armed for her battle as a son could not have been: it was upon Sir Basil, upon Imogen, that the torchlight rested.

He looked presently from them to Valerie. Did she know at all what was her peril? had she seen at all what threatened her? She was talking to Miss Bocock and her serenity, as of mellow moonlight, cooled and calmed him a little so that he could wonder whether the peril were very imminent after all. Even if the unbelievable had happened; even if Imogen had ensnared Sir Basil—Jack's thoughts in dealing with poor Imogen passed in their ruthlessness beyond the facts—even if she had ensnared him, surely, surely, she could not keep him. The glamour would pass from him. He would be the first to fight clear of it were he fully aware of what it signified. For Imogen knew—the torchlight had revealed that to Jack—Imogen knew, he and Imogen alone knew; Sir Basil didn't and Valerie didn't. Single-handed he might save them both: save them both from Imogen. To this strange landing-place had his long voyage, away from old ports, old landmarks, brought him, and on its rocks he stepped to-night, bound on a perilous quest in an unknown country. It seemed almost like a coast on another planet, so desolate, so lonely. But beyond the frowning headlands he imagined that he would find, far inland, quiet green stretches where he would rest and think of her. The landing was

bathed in a light sadder but sweeter far than the sunlight of other countries. Here he was to fight, not for himself, for her.

The first move of strategy was made directly after dinner. He asked Imogen to come out and see the moonlight with him.

A word to the wise was a word to Mrs. Wake, who safely cornered Miss Bocock and the Potts over a game of cards. Jack saw Valerie and Sir Basil established on the verandah and then led Imogen away, drew her from her quarry, along the winding path in the woods.

CHAPTER XXII

VALERIE, on sinking into the low wicker chair and drawing her chuddah about her shoulders, drawing it closely, although the evening was not cool, had expected to find Jack, or Mrs. Wake, or Miss Bocock presently beside her.

She had watched, as they wandered, all of them, into the drawing-room, the hovering, long since familiar to her, of Sir Basil. She had seen that his eye was as much on Imogen as on herself. She had seen Imogen's eye meet his with a deep insistence. What it commanded, this eye, Valerie did not know, but she had grown accustomed to seeing such glances obeyed, and she expected to watch, presently, Imogen and Sir Basil depart into the moonlit woods.

It was therefore with surprise that she looked up to see Sir Basil's form darken against the sky. He asked if he might smoke his cigar beside her, and the intelligent smile he knew so well rested upon him as he took the chair next hers.

In the slight pause that followed, both were thinking that, since their parting in England, they had really been very seldom alone together, and in Sir Basil's mind was a wonder, very disquieting, as to what, really, the understanding under the parting had been.

He was well aware that any vagueness as to under-

standing had been owing entirely to Valerie, well aware that had she not always kept about them the atmosphere of sunny frankness and gay friendship, he would without doubt have entangled himself and her in the complications of an avowed devotion, and that long before her husband's death. For how she had charmed him, this gay, this deep-hearted friend, descending suddenly on his monotonous life with a flutter of wings, a flash of colour, a liquid pulse of song, like some strange, bright bird. Charm had grown to affection, and to trustful need, and then to the pain and sadness of his hidden passion. He would have spoken, he knew it very well, were it not that she had never given him the faintest chance to speak, the faintest excuse for speaking. She had kept him from any avowal so completely that he might well now wonder if his self-control hadn't been owing far more to the intuition of hopelessness than to mere submission. Could she have kept him so silent had she been the least little bit in love with him? He had, of course, been tremendously in love with her—it was bewildering to use the past tense—and she, of course, clever creature that she was, must have known it; but hadn't he been very fatuous in imagining that beneath her fond, playful friendship lay the possibility of a deeper response?

Since seeing her again, in her effaced, maternal rôle, he had realized that she was more middle-aged than he had ever thought her, and since coming to Vermont there had been a new emphasis in this cool, grey quality that removed her the more from associations with youth and passion. So was he brought, by the dizzy turn of events, to hoping that loyalty to his own past love was, for him, the only question,

since loyalty to her, in that respect, had never been expected of him.

Yet, as he took his place beside her and looked at her sitting there in the golden light, wrapped round in white, very wan and pale, despite her smile, he felt the strangest, twisted pang of divided desire.

She was wan and she was pale, but she was not cool, she was not grey; he felt in her, as strongly as in far-off days, the warmth and fragrance, and knew that it was Imogen who had so cast her into a shadow. Her image had grown dim on that very first time of seeing Imogen standing as Antigone in the rapt, hushed theatre. That dawn had culminated to-day in the overmastering, all-revealing burst of noon, and from its radiance the past had been hardly visible except as shadow. But now he sat in the moonlight, the past personified in the quiet presence beside him, and the memory of noonday itself became mirage-like and uncertain. He almost felt as if he had been having a wild dream and that Valerie's glance was the awakening from it.

To think of Imogen's filial grief and of his promise to her—a promise deeply recalled to him by the message of her tear-worn eyes, to steady his mind to the task of friendly helpfulness, was to put aside the accompanying memory of eyes, lips, gold hair on a background of flowering laurel, was to re-enter, through sane, kind altruism, his old, normal state of consciousness, and to shut the door on something very sweet and wonderful, to shut the door—in Imogen's phraseology—on his soul, but in doing that to be loyal to the older hope.

Perhaps, he reflected, looking at Valerie through the silvery circles of smoke, it depended on her as to

whether the door should remain shut on all the high visions of the last weeks. After all, it had always depended on her, tremendously, as to where he should find himself. Certainly he couldn't regard her as the antithesis of soul, though he didn't associate her with radiant demonstration of it, yet he felt that, if she so willed it, she could lock the door on visions and keep him sanely, safely, sweetly beside her for the future—if she really did care. Poor Sir Basil, sitting there in his faint cloud of smoke, while clouds of doubt and perplexity as impalpable drifted through his mind, really couldn't for the life of him have told which solution he most hoped for.

He plunged from the rather humiliating pause of self-contemplation into the more congenial field of action, with a last swift thought—most illuminating of all—as he plunged, that in the results of action he would find his test. If she cared for him—really cared —she would grant his request ; and if she cared, why then, not only reawakened loyalty but some very deep need in his own nature would keep him beside her, and to-night would see them as affianced lovers. It would be a pity to have to let one's new-found soul go ; but, after all, it was so very new that the pang of parting would soon be over : that was a good point about middle-age—one soon got over pangs, soon forgot visions.

" I want to talk to you about something. I'm going to ask you to be kinder to me, even, than you've ever been "—so he approached the subject, while the mingled peace and bitterness of the last thought lingered with him. " I'm going to ask you to let me be very indiscreet, very intimate. It's about something very personal."

Valerie no longer smiled, but she looked even more gentle and even more intelligent. "I will be as kind as you can possibly want me to be," she answered.

"It's about—about Miss Upton."

"About Imogen? Don't you call her Imogen yet? You must."

"I will. I've just begun," and with this avowal Sir Basil turned away his eyes for a moment and even in the moonlight showed his flush. "I had a long talk with her this afternoon."

"Yes. I supposed that you had. You may be perfectly frank with me," said Valerie, her eyes on his averted face.

"She was most dreadfully cut up, you know. She came rushing up to the pine-woods—I was smoking there—rushing up as if she were running for her life—crying, exhausted, in a dreadful state."

"Yes. I know."

"Yes, of course you do. What don't you know and what don't you understand?" said Sir Basil gratefully, his eyes coming back to hers. "So I needn't go over it all—what she feels about it. I realize very well that you feel for her as much as I do."

"Oh, yes, you must realize that," said Valerie, a little faintly.

"She was in such a state that one simply had to try to comfort her—if one could; and we have come to be such friends. So she told me everything."

"Yes. Of course."

"Well, that's just it. What I want to ask you is—can't you, for her sake, quite apart from your own feelings, give in about it?" So spoke Sir Basil sitting in the moonlight, the spark of his cigar waning as, in the long pause that followed, he held it, for-

gotten, in an expectant, arrested hand. Her voice had helped and followed him with such gentleness, such understanding that, though the pause grew, he hardly thought that it needed the added, "I do beg it of you," that he brought out presently to make her acquiescence more sure; and his shock of disappointment was sharpened by surprise to a quick displeasure when, her eyes passing from his face and resting for long on the shadowy woods, she said in a deadened voice, a voice strangely lacking in feeling: "I can't."

He couldn't conceal the disappointment nor, quite, the displeasure. "You can't? Really you can't? Forgive me, but don't you think she's a right to have it written, her father's life, you know, if she feels so deeply about it?"

"I can't. I will never give my consent," Valerie repeated.

"But she's breaking her heart over it," Sir Basil deeply protested, and before the quality of the protestation she paused again, as though to give herself time to hide something.

"I know that it is hard for her," was all she said at last.

Protestation gave way to wonder, deep and sad. "And for her sake—for *my* sake, let me put it—you can't let bygones be bygones? You can't give her her heart's desire? My dear friend, it's such a little thing."

"I know that. But it's for his sake that I can't," said Valerie.

Sir Basil, at this, was silent for a long time. Perplexity mingled with his displeasure, and the pain of failure, the strangely complex pain.

She did not care for him enough; and she was

wrong, and she was fantastic in her wrongness. For his sake?—the dead husband whom, after all, she had abandoned and made unhappy? Imogen's words came crowding upon him like a host of warning angel visages. She actually told him that this cruel thwarting of her child was for the sake of the child's father? It was strange and pitiful that a woman so sweet, so lovely, should so grotesquely deceive herself as to her motives for refusing to see bare justice done.

"May I ask why for him? I don't understand," he said.

Valerie now turned her eyes once more on his face. With his words, with the tone, courteous yet cold, in which they were spoken, she recognized that they had reached a landmark. For a long time she had caught glimpses of it, ominously glimmering ahead of her, through the sunny mists of hope, across the wide stretches of trust. And here it was at last, but so suddenly, for all her presages, that she almost lost her breath for a moment in looking at it and what it signified. Here, unless she grasped, paths might part. Here, unless she pleaded, something might be slain. Here, above all, something might turn its back on her for ever, unless she were disloyal to her own strange trust. A good many things had been happening to Valerie of late, but this was really the worst, and as she looked at the landmark it grew to be the headstone of a grave, and she saw that under it might lie her youth.

"I don't believe that you could understand, ever," she said at last in an unaltered voice, a voice, to her own consciousness, like the wrapping of a shroud about her. "It's only I who could feel it so deeply as to go so far. All that I can say to you is this:

my husband was a mediocre man and a pretentious one. I once loved him. I was always sorry for him. I must shield him now. I cannot have him exposed. I cannot have his mediocrity and pretentiousness displayed to the people there are in the world who would see him as he was and whose opinion counts."

She knew, as she said it, as she folded the shroud, that he would not be one of those. Her husband's pretentiousness and mediocrity would not be apparent to the ingenuous and uncomplex mind beside her. She knew that mind too well and had watched it, of late, receiving with wondering admiration from her daughter's lips the echoes of her husband's fatuities. She loved him for his incapacity to see sad and ugly and foolish facts as she saw them. She loved his manliness and his childishness. As she had shielded the other once loved man from exposure, she would have guarded this one from ironic and complex visions. But the lack that endeared him to her might lose him to her. He could never see as she saw, and her fidelity to her own light could in his eyes appear only as a perversity. Besides, she could guess at the interpretations that loomed in his mind; could guess at what Imogen had told him: it hardly needed his next words to let her know.

"But was he so mediocre, so pretentious?" he suggested, with the touch of timidity that comes from a deeper hostility than one can openly avow. "Aren't you a little over-critical—through being disappointed in him—personally? Can you be so sure of your own verdict as all that? Other people, who loved him—who always loved him I mean—are sure the other way round," said Sir Basil.

To prove herself faithful, not perverse, whom must

she show to him as unfaithful—unfaithful in all unconsciousness? In the midst of all the wrenching of her hidden passion came a pang of maternal pity. Imogen's figure, bereaved of her father, of her lover, desolate, amazed, rose before her and, behind it, the hovering, retributory gaze of her husband.

This, then, was what she must pay for having failed, for having wrecked. The money that she handed out must be her love, her deep love, for this lover of her fading years; and she knew that she paid the price, for everything—paid the price, above all, for her right to her own complex fidelity—when she said: "I am quite sure of my own verdict. I take all the responsibility. I think other people wrong. And you must think me wrong, if it looks to you like that."

"But it's almost impossible for me to think you wrong," said Sir Basil, feeling that a chill far frostier than the seeming situation warranted had crept upon them. "Even if you are—why, we all are, of course, most of the time, I suppose. It's only—it's only that I can't see clear. That you should be so sure of an opinion, a mere opinion, when it hurts some one else, so abominably—it's there I don't seem to *see* you, you know."

"Can't you trust me?" Valerie asked. It was her last chance, her last throw of the dice. She knew that her heart was suffocating her with its heavy throbbing; but to Sir Basil's ear her voice was still the deadened, the unchanged voice. "Can't you believe in my sincerity when I give you my reasons? Can't you, knowing me as you do, for so long, believe that I am more likely to be right, in my judgment of my husband, than—other people?"

Her eyes, dark and deep in the moonlight, were steadily upon him. And now, probed to the depths, he too was conscious of a parting of the ways. It was a choice of loyalties, and he remembered those other eyes—sunlit, limpid, uplifted—that lifted him too with their heavenly upward gaze. He stammered, he grew very red ; but he too was faithful to his own light.

" Of course, I know, my dear friend, that you are sincere. But, as to your being right— : in these things one can't help seeing crookedly sometimes, when personal dislike has entered into a—a near relationship. One really can hardly help it, can one ? " he almost pleaded.

Valerie's eyes rested deeply and darkly upon him, and, as they rested, he felt, strangely and irresistibly, that they let him go : let him go—to sink or to soar, that depended on which vision were the truer.

He knew that after his flush he had become very pale. His cigar had gone out ; he looked at it with a nervous gesture. The moonlight was cold and Valerie had turned away her eyes. But, as she suddenly rose, he saw, glancing from his dismal survey of the dead cigar, that she was smiling again. It was a smile that healed even while it made things hazy to him. Nothing was hazy to her, he was very sure of that ; but she would make everything as easy as possible to him—even the pain of finding her so wrong, even the pain of seeing that she didn't care enough, the complex pain of being set free to seize the new happiness—he was surer of that than ever.

He, too, got up, grateful, troubled, but warm once more.

The moonlight was bright and golden, and the

shadows of the vines that stirred against the sky wavered all over her as she stood before him. So strangely did the light and shade move upon her that it seemed as if she glided through the ripples of some liquid, mysterious element, not air nor light nor water, but a magical mingling of the three. He had just time to feel, vaguely, for everything was blurred, this sense of strangeness and of sweetness too, when she gave him her hand.

"Friends, as ever, all the same—are we not?" she said.

Sir Basil, knowing that if he glided it was only because she took him with her, grasped it tightly, the warm, tangible comfort. "Well, *rather*!" he said with schoolboy emphasis.

Be she as wrong as she would, dear creature of light, of shade, of mystery, it was indeed "Well, rather!" Never had he known how much till now.

Holding the hand, he wondered, gazing at her, how much such a friendship, new yet old, counted for. In revealing it so fully, she had set wide the door, she had set him free to claim his soul; yet so wonderfully did they glide that no gross thought of escape touched him for a moment, so beautifully she smiled that he seemed rather to be gaining something than to be giving something up.

CHAPTER XXIII

IMOGEN always looked back to her moonlight walk with Jack as one of the few occurrences in her life that, at the time, she had not understood. She understood well enough afterwards, with retrospective vexation for her so ludicrous, yet, after all, so natural innocence. At the time she hadn't even seen that Jack had jockeyed her out of a communing with Sir Basil. She had actually thought that Jack might have some word of penitence or exculpation to say to her after his behaviour that morning. As a matter of fact, she could easily have forgiven him had his lack of sympathy been for her instruments only and not rather for her project. Really, except for the triumph it had seemed to give to her mother and the humiliation that it had seemed, vicariously, to inflict upon herself, she hadn't been able to defend herself from a queer sense of pleasure in witnessing the ejection of the Potts. With the tension that had come into the scene, they had been in the way; she, as keenly as Jack, had felt the sense of unfitness though she had been willing to endure it, and as keenly as Jack she had felt Mr. Potts insufferably presuming. She had been glad that his presumption should inflict punishment upon her mother, but glad, too, that when the weapon had served its purpose it should be removed.

So her feelings towards Jack, as he led her down the

woodland path where, not so many days ago—but how far off they seemed—she had led Sir Basil, were not so bitter as they might have been. Bitterness was in abeyance. She waited to hear what he might have to say for himself and about her—about this new disaster that had befallen her; and with the thought of the retribution that she held almost within her grasp, came something of a softening to sadness and regret over Jack. In spite of that glorious moment of the pine-woods, with its wide vistas into the future, some torn fibre of her heart would go on aching when she thought of Jack and his lost love, and when he led her away among the woods, thick with trembling lights and shadows, she really, for a little while, expected to hear him say that, sympathize as he might with her mother, reprobate as he might her own attitude towards her, there were needs in him deeper than sympathies or blame; she almost expected him to tell her that, above all, he loved her and couldn't get on without her. Else why had he asked her to come and see the moonlight in the woods? A vagueness hovered for her over her own attitude in case of such an avowal, a vagueness connected with the veil that still hung between her unavowed lover and herself; and even as she walked away with Jack she felt a mingled pang of eagerness for what he might have to say to her and of anxiety for what, more than his petition on her behalf, Sir Basil might be drawn into saying to her mother on the verandah. She didn't crudely tell herself that she would not quite abandon Jack until the veil were drawn aside and triumph securely attained; she only saw herself, as far as she saw herself at all, as pausing between two choices, pausing to weigh which was the greater of the appealing

needs and which the deeper of the proffered loves. She knew that the balance inclined to Sir Basil's side, but she saw herself, for this evening, sadly listening, but withholding, in its full definiteness, the sad rejection of Jack's tardy appeal.

With this background of interpretation it was therefore with a growing perplexity that she heard Jack, beside her or a little before, so that he might hold back the dewy branches from her way, talk on persistently, fluently, cheerfully, in just the same manner, with the same alert voice and pleasant though watchful eye, that he had talked at dinner. Her mother might have been walking beside them for all the difference there was. Jack, the shy, the abrupt, the often awkward, seemed infected with her mother's social skill. The moonlit woods were as much a mere background for manœuvres as the candle-lit dinner-table had been. Not a word of the morning's disaster; not a word of sympathy or inquiry; not a word of self-defence or self-exposition; not even a word of expostulation or reproach. As for entreaty, tenderness, the drawing near once more, the drop to loving need after the climax of alienation, she saw, by degrees, how illusory any such imagining had been; she saw at last, with a sharpness that chilled her blood, that Jack was abdicating the lover's rôle more decisively than ever before. Verbal definiteness left hazes of possibility compared to this dreadfully competent reticence. It was more than evasion, more than reticence, more than abdication that she felt in Jack: it was a deep hostility, it was the steady burning of the flame that she had seen in his eye that morning when she had told her mother that she was cruel and shallow and selfish. This was an enemy who walked beside

her and, after perplexity, after the folly of soft imaginings, the folly of having allowed her heart to yearn over him a little and perhaps over herself, indignation rushed upon her and humiliation and then the passionate longing for vengeance.

He thought himself very cool and competent, this skilful Jack, leading her down in the illumined, dewy woods, talking on and on, talking—the fool, for so, with a bitter smile, her inner commentary dubbed him—of Manet, of Monet, of Whistler, of the decomposition of light, the vibration of colour.

From the heat of fierce anger Imogen reached a contemptuous coolness. She made no attempt to stay his volubility ; she answered, quietly, accurately, with chill interest, all he said. They might really have met for the first time at dinner that night, had it not been that Jack's competence was a little feverish, her own courtesy a little edged. But the swing from tender sadness to perplexity, to fury, to contempt, was so violent that not until they turned to retrace their steps did a very pertinent question begin to make itself felt. It made itself felt with the sudden leap to fear of that underlying anxiety as to what was happening on the verandah, and the fear lit the question with a lurid though, as yet, not a revealing flicker. For why had he done it ? That was what she asked herself as they faced the moonlight and saw the woods all dark on a background of mystical gold. What fatuous complacency had made him take so much trouble just to show her how little he cared for what she might be feeling, for what he had himself once felt ?

Imogen pondered, striding before him with her long, light step, urged now by the inner pressure of fear as

to the exchange that her absence had made possible between her mother and Sir Basil. It had been foolish of her to leave him for so long, exposed and helpless. Instinctively her step hastened as she went and, Jack following closely, they almost ran at last, silent and breathing quickly. Imogen had, indeed, the uncanny sensation of being pursued, tracked, kept in sight by her follower. From the last thin screen of branches she emerged, finally, into the grassy clearing.

There was a flicker of white on the verandah. In the shadow of the creepers stood two figures, clasping hands. Her mother and Sir Basil.

Fear beat suddenly, suffocatingly, in Imogen's throat. A tide of humiliation, like the towering of a gigantic wave above her head, seemed to rise and encompass her round about. She had counted too soon upon gladness, upon vengeance. Everything was stripped from her, if—if Jack and her mother had succeeded. With lightning-like rapidity her mind grasped its suspicion. She looked back at Jack. His eyes, too, were fixed on the verandah and suspicion was struck to certainty by what she read in them. He was tense; he was white; he was triumphant—too soon triumphant. In another moment the imminence of her terror passed by. The clasp was not that of a plighting. It was over; it denoted some lesser compact, one that meant, perhaps, success for her almost forgotten hope. But in Jack's eye she had read what was her danger.

Imogen paused but for a moment to draw the breath of a mingled relief and realization. Her knowledge was the only weapon left in her hand, and strength, safety, the mere semblance of dignity, lay in the concealment of it. If he guessed that Sir Basil needed guarding,

he should never guess that she did. Already her headlong speed might have jeopardised her secret.

"What a pretty setting for our elderly lovers, isn't it?" she said.

That her voice should slightly tremble was only natural; he must know that even from full unconsciousness such a speech must be for her a forced and painful one.

Jack looked her full in the eye, as steadily as she looked at him. "Isn't it?" he said.

CHAPTER XXIV

SHE had seen through him and she continued to see through him.

She had little opportunity for more than this passive part on the next day, a day of goings and comings, when the Potts departed and Rose, Mary and Eddy arrived.

He was guarding her mother's lover for her, guarding him from the allurement of her own young loveliness: that was the way Jack saw it. He was very skilful, very competent, she had to own that as she watched him; but he was not quite so omniscient as he imagined himself to be: for he did not know that she saw. That was Imogen's one clue in those two or three days of fear and confusion, days when, actually, Jack did succeed in keeping her and Sir Basil apart. And she must make no endeavour to thwart his watchfulness; she must yield with apparent unconsciousness to his combinations, combinations that always separated her and Sir Basil; she must see him drive off with Sir Basil to meet the new-comers; must see him lead Sir Basil away with himself and Eddy for a masculine smoke and talk; must see him, after dinner, fix them all, irrevocably, at bridge for the rest of the evening—and not stir a finger: for he did not know that she saw and he did not know that she, as well as Sir Basil, needed guarding. It was here that Imogen's intuition failed her and that her blindness made Jack's task the easier.

Imogen, in these days, had little time for self-observation. She seemed living in some dark, fierce region of her nature, unknown to her till now, where she found only fear and fury and the deep determination not to be defeated and bereft. So supremely real were will and instinct that, seen from their dominion, conscience, reason, all the spiritual tests she had lived by, looked like far, pale clouds floating over some sombre, burning landscape, where, among flames and darkness, she was running for her life. Reason, conscience, were still with her, but turned to the task of self-preservation. "He is mine. I know it. I felt it. They shall not take him from me. It is my right, my duty, to keep him, for he is all that I have left in life." The last veil descended upon her soul when, her frosty young nature fired by the fierceness of her resolution, she felt herself to be passionately in love with Sir Basil.

On the third day, the third day of her *vita nuova*—so she named it—Jack had organized a picnic. They were to drive ten miles to a mountain lake among pine-woods, and, thrilling all through with rage, Imogen saw Sir Basil safely manœuvred into the carriage with her mother, Rose and Eddy, while she was assigned to Jack, Miss Bocock and Mary.

She heard herself talk sweetly and fluently during the long, sunny, breezy drive, heard Jack answering and assenting with a fluency, a sweetness as apt. Mary was very silent, but Miss Bocock, no doubt, found nothing amiss in the tone of their interchange. Arrived at the beautiful spot fixed on, sunlight drifting over glades of fern, the shadowy woods encircling a lake of blue and silver, she could say, with just the right emphasis of helpless admiration—"Wonderful, wonderful," could quote a line of Wordsworth, while her

eye passed over the figure of Sir Basil, talking to Rose at a little distance, and over Jack's figure, near at hand.

Jack and Eddy had driven, and the moment came when they were occupied with their horses. She joined the others and, presently, she was able to draw Sir Basil a little aside, and then still a little further, until, among the rosy aisles, she had him to herself. Stooping to gather a tiny cone she said to him in a low voice: "Well? well? What did she say?"

Sir Basil, too, lowered his voice. "I've wanted a chance to tell you about it. My dear child, I'm so very sorry, but I've been a failure. She won't hear of it. You'll have to give it up."

"She utterly refused?" How far this matter of her father was from her thoughts, as far as the pale clouds above the fierce, dark landscape.

"Utterly."

"You asked for your sake, as well as for mine?"

"I asked for both our sakes."

"And—" still stooping, her face hidden from him, she pierced to find the significance of that moonlight hand-clasp. "And—she made you agree with her?"

"Agree with her? I was most dreadfully disappointed, and I had to tell her so. How could I agree with her?"

"She might have made you."

"She didn't make me; didn't try to, I'm bound to say."

"But"—her voice breathed up to him now with a new gentleness, a gentleness that he well might think covered heart-brokenness.—"But you haven't quarrelled with her—on my account? I couldn't bear her to lose things, on my account. She thinks of you

as a friend—values your friendship; I know it, I am sure of it—even though she would not do this for you. Some hatreds are too deep to yield to any appeal; but it is friendship I know, and I love her—in spite of everything."

She had murmured on and on, parting the ferns with her delicate hand, finding here and there a little cone, and as Sir Basil looked down at the golden hair, the pure line of the cheek, a great wave of thanksgiving for the surety of his freedom rose in him.

"Dear, sweet child," he said, "this is just what I would expect of you. But don't let that thought trouble you for one moment. I do think her wrong, but we are perhaps better friends than ever. You and I will always care for her—" Sir Basil's voice faltered a little as, to himself, the significance of these last words was borne in upon him, and Imogen, hearing the falter, rose, feeling that she must see as well as hear.

And as she faced him they heard Jack's cheery call—

"Sir Basil—I say, Sir Basil! You are wanted. You must help with the hampers."

Imogen controlled every least sign of exasperation; it was the easier, since she had gained something from this snatched interview. Her mother had in no way harmed her in Sir Basil's eyes and this avowal of friendship might include an abdication of nearer claims. And so she walked back beside him, telling him that her cones were for her little cripples.—"You are always thinking about some one else's happiness," said Sir Basil,—with a tranquillity less feigned than it had been of late. Nothing was lost, nothing really desperate yet. But, during the rest of the afternoon, while they made tea, spread viands, sat about on the moss and rocks laughing, talking, eating, the sense of risk did

not leave her. Nothing was lost, yet, but it was just possible that what she had, in her folly, expected to happen the other night to her and Jack, might really happen to Sir Basil and her mother; in the extremity of alienation they might find the depths of need. He thought her wrong but he, too, thought her charming.

Sitting a little above them all, on a higher rock, watching them while seeming not to watch, she felt that her sense of peril strangely isolated her from the thoughtless group. She could guess at nothing from her mother's face. She had not spoken with her mother since the day of the disaster—and of the dawn. It was probable that, like her own sad benignity, her mother's placidity was nothing but a veil, but she could not believe that it veiled a sense of peril.

Under her white straw hat, with broad black ribands tying beneath the chin, she was very pale—but that was usual of late—and very worn, too, as she should be; but she was more full of charm than she had any right to be. Her mother—oh! despite pallor and fading—was a woman to be loved, and that she believed herself a woman loved, Imogen, with a deep stirring of indignation and antagonism, suspected. Yes, she counted upon Sir Basil, of that Imogen was sure, but what she couldn't make out was whether her mother guessed that her confidence was threatened. Did she at all see where Sir Basil's heart had turned, as Jack had seen? Was her mother, too, capable of Jack's manœuvres?

From her mother she looked at Sir Basil, looked with eyes marvellously serene. He lounged delightfully. His clothes were delightfully right, they seemed as much a part of his personality as the cones were of the pines, the ferns of the long glades. Rightness,

exquisite, unconscious rightness, was what he expressed. Not the rightness of warfare and effort that Imogen believed in and stood for, but a rightness that had come to him as a gift, not as a conquest, just as the cones had come to the pine-trees. The way he tilted his panama hat over his eyes so that only his chin and crisply twisted moustache were unshadowed, the way in which he held his cigarette in a hand so brown that the gold of the seal ring upon it looked pale, even the way in which he wagged, now and then, his foot in its shapely tan shoe, were all as delightful as his limpid smile up at her mother, as his voice, deep, decisive and limpid, too.

Imogen was not aware of these appreciations in herself as she watched him with that serene covertness, not at all aware that her senses were lending her a hand in her struggle for possession and ascendancy and giving to her hold on the new and threatened belonging a peculiar tenacity. But she did tell herself, again and again, with pride and pain, that this at last was love, a love that justified anything and that cast all lesser things aside. And, with this thought of rejection, Imogen found her eyes turning to Jack. She looked at Jack as serenely as she had at Sir Basil, and at him she could trust herself to look more fixedly. Jack's rightnesses were not a bit like those of nature. He was hesitant, unfinished, beside Sir Basil. His voice was meagre, his form was meagre, his very glance lacked the full, untroubled assurance of the other's. As for his clothes, with a sly little pleasure Imogen noted, point by point, how they just missed easy perfection. Very certainly this man who had failed her was a trophy not comparable to the man who cared for her now. She told herself that very often, emphasiz-

ing the unfavourable contrast. For, strangely enough, it was now, at the full distance of her separation from Jack, an irrevocable separation, that she needed the support such emphasis provided. In Jack's absent stare at the lake, his nervous features composed to momentary unconsciousness, she could but feel a quality that, helplessly, she must appreciate. There was in the young man's face a purity, a bravery, a capacity for subtle spiritual choice that made it, essentially, one of the most civilized she had ever known. Sir Basil's brain, if it came to comparisons, lacked one or two convolutions that Jack's undoubtedly possessed. And, appreciating the lost lover, as, through her own sharpness of intelligence she was bound to do, poor Imogen knew, like Sir Basil before her, the twisted pang of divided desire. Was it the higher that she had lost, or the higher that she so strangely struggled for? Her eyes turning again on Sir Basil stayed themselves on the assurances of his charm, his ease, his rightnesses; but the worst bitterness of all lurked under these consolations; for, though one was lost, the other was not securely gained.

Imogen, that night, made another dash for the open, only, again, to be foiled. Her mother and Miss Bocock were safely on the verandah in the moonlight, the others safely talking in the drawing-room; Sir Basil, only, was not to be seen, and Imogen presently detected the spark of his cigar wandering among the flower-borders. She could venture on boldness, though she skirted about the house to join him. What if Jack did see them together? It was only natural that, if she were unconscious, she should now and then seek out her paternal friend. But hardly had she emerged from the shadow of the house, hardly had Sir Basil become

aware of her approach when, with laughter and chattering outcries the whole intolerable horde was upon her. It was Rose who voiced the associated proposal, a moonlight ramble, it was Rose who seized upon Sir Basil with her hateful air of indifferent yet assured coquetry; but Imogen guessed that she was a tool, even if an ignorant one, in the hands of Jack. Miss Bocock and her mother had not joined them and, in a last desperate hope, Imogen said, "Mamma, too, and Miss Bocock, we mustn't leave them. Sir Basil, won't you go and fetch them." And then, Sir Basil detached from Rose, on his way, she murmured, "I must see that she doesn't forget her shawl," and darted after him. Once more get him to herself, and, in the obscurity of the woods, they might elude the others yet.

But, as they approached the verandah, she found that Jack was beside them.

Neither Valerie nor Miss Bocock cared to join the expedition and Valerie, cryptically, for her daughter's understanding, said: "Do you really want more scenery, Sir Basil? You and Imogen had much better keep us company here. We have earned a lazy evening."

"Oh, no, but Rose has claimed Sir Basil as her cavalier," Jack, astonishingly, cut in. "It's all her idea, so that she could have a talk with him. Do you come, too," Jack urged. "It's only a little walk and the moonlight is wonderful among the woods."

Mrs. Upton's eye rested fixedly upon him for a moment, Imogen saw that, but could not know whether her mother shared her own astonishment for Jack's development or whether the look were of the nature of an interchange. She shook her head, however. "No, thanks, I am too tired. Be sure and show Sir Basil the view

from the rustic seat, Imogen. And, oh, Imogen, do you and Sir Basil go to the pantry and ask Selma for some cakes. You will like something to eat."

"I'll come," said Jack cheerfully. "I must get my stick." And thus it was that Sir Basil remained standing beside Mrs. Upton, while the young couple, in absolute silence, accomplished their mission.

Imogen only wondered, as they went, side by side, swiftly round to the pantry if Jack did not hear the deep, indignant breaths she vainly tried to master. The rest of the evening repeated the indignities of the afternoon. She was watched, guarded baffled. Proudly she relinquished every attempt to checkmate; and her mother was not there; for the moment there was no anxiety on that score. But the sense of deep breathing did not leave her. Was there anything Jack would stop at? She was quite sure that he would lie, if, technically, he had not lied already. The stick had been in the hall near the pantry. If it hadn't; well, with her consciousness of whistling speed, of a neck to neck race, she really would not have had time for a pause of wonder and condemnation.

CHAPTER XXV

SHE woke next morning to that fierce consciousness of a race. And the goal must now be near, defeat or victory imminent.

It was early and she dressed quickly. She couldn't boldly rap at Sir Basil's door and call him to join her in the garden for a dewy walk before breakfast, for Jack's was the room next his; but outside, as she drifted to and fro over the lawn, in full view of his window, she sang to herself, so that he could hear, sang sweetly, loudly, sadly, a strain of Wagner. It happened, indeed, to be the Pilgrim's March from Tannhaüser that she fixed upon for her *aubade*. Jack would never suspect such singing, and Sir Basil must surely seize its opportunity. But he did not appear.

She surmised that he was not yet up and that it might be wiser to wait for him in the dining-room.

As she crossed the verandah she heard voices round the corner, a snatch of talk from two other early risers sitting outside the drawing-room windows. Mary and Rose; she placed them, as she paused.

"But Jack himself often talks in just that way," Mary was saying, pained it was evident, and puzzled, too, by some imputation that she hadn't been able to deny.

"Yes, dear old Jack," Rose rejoined; "he does talk in a very tiresome way sometimes, so do you, Mary,

my darling; you are all tarred with the same solemn brush; but, you see, it's just that; one may talk like a prig and yet not be one. Jack, behind the big words, means them all, is them all, really. Whereas Imogen —why, she's little—little—little. Even Jack has found that out at last."

"Rose! Rose! Don't! It's not true. I can't believe it! I won't believe it," broke from Mary. Her chair was pushed back impetuously and Imogen darted into the dining-room and from there into the hall to find herself at last face to face with Sir Basil.

"I hoped I'd find you. I heard you singing. What is that thing—Gounod, isn't it? Do let's have a turn in the garden."

But even as he said it, holding her hand, the fatal chink of the approaching breakfast tray told them that the opportunity had come too late. Rose and Mary already were greeting them, Jack and Miss Bocock called morning wishes from above.

Valerie was a late riser, and Imogen, behind the tea-pot and coffee-urn was always conscious of offering a crisp and charming contrast to lax self-indulgence. But this morning, as they all hemmed her in, fixed her in her rightful place, her cheeks irrepressibly burned with vexation and disappointment. The overheard insolence, too, had been like a sudden slap. She mastered herself sufficiently to kiss Mary's cheek and to take Rose's hand with a gaze of pure unconsciousness, a gaze that should have been as a coal of fire laid upon her venemous head. But Rose showed no symptom of scorching.

She trailed to her place, in a morning-gown all lace and ribbons, smiling nonchalantly at Jack and saucily at Sir Basil, with whom she had established relations

of chaffing coquetry; she told Imogen to remember that she liked her coffee half-and-half with a lot of cream and three lumps of sugar. She looked as guiltless as poor Mary looked guilty. "Eddy's late as usual, I suppose," she said.

"He inherits laziness from Mamma," Imogen smiled, putting in four lumps, a trivial vengeance she could not resist.

"Some of her charms he has inherited, it's true." Rose, in the absence of her worshipped hostess, gave herself extreme licence in guileless prods and thrusts. "I only wish he had inherited more. Here you are, Eddy, after all, falsifying my hopes of you. We are talking about your hereditary good points, Eddy; in what others, except morning laziness, do you resemble your mother?"

"Well, I hate strings of milk in my coffee," said Eddy, bending over his sister to put a perfunctory kiss upon her brow, "and as I observe one in that cup I hope it's not intended for me. Imogen, why won't you use the strainer?"

With admirable patience, as if humouring two spoiled children, Imogen filled another cup with greater care.

"Mamma feels just as I do about strings in coffee," said Eddy, bearing away his cup. "We are both of us very highly organized."

"You mustn't be over-sensitive, you know," said Imogen, "else you will unfit yourself for life. There are so many strings in one's coffee in life."

"The fit avoid them," said Eddy, "as I do."

"You inherit that, too, from Mamma," said Imogen; "the avoidance of difficulties. Do try some of our pop-overs, Miss Bocock; it's a national dish."

"What are you going to do this morning, Imogen?"

Jack asked, and she felt that his eye braved hers. "It's your Girls' Club morning, isn't it? That will do beautifully for you, Miss Bocock. I've been telling Miss Bocock about it; she is very much interested."

"Very much indeed. I am on the committee of such a club in England," said Miss Bocock. "I should like to go over it with you."

Imogen smiled assent, while inwardly she muttered, "Snake!" Her morning, already, was done for, unless, indeed, she could annex Sir Basil as a third to the party and, with him, evade Miss Bocock for a few brief moments. But brief moments could do nothing for them. They needed long sunny or moonlit solitudes. "We must be alone together, under the stars, for our souls to *see*," Imogen said to herself, while she poured the coffee, while she met Jack's eye, while, beneath this highest thought, the lesser comment of "Snake!" made itself heard.

"What's become of that interesting girl who had the rival club, Imogen?" Rose asked. "The one you squashed?"

"We make her very welcome when she comes to ours." Imogen did not descend to self-exculpation. She spoke gently and gravely, casting only a glance at Sir Basil, as if calling him to witness her pained magnanimity.

"It would be fun, you know, to help her to start a new one," said Rose; "something rebellious and anarchic. Will you help me if I do, Eddy? Come, let's sow discord in Imogen's Eden, like a couple of serpents."

Reptilian analogies seemed uppermost this morning; Imogen felt their fitness while, smiling on, she answered: "I don't think that mere rebellion—not only against

Eden but against the Tree of Knowledge as well—would carry you far, Rose. Your membership would be of three—Mattie and the two serpents."

Sir Basil laughed out at the retort.

"You evidently don't know the club and all those delightful young women," he said to Rose.

"Oh, yes, indeed I do. Every one sees Imogen's clubs. I don't think them delightful. Women in crowds are always horrid. We are only tolerable in isolation."

"You hand over to us, then"—it was Jack who spoke, and with his usual impatience when bending to Rose's folly—"all the civic virtues, all the virtues of fraternity?"

"With pleasure; they are becoming to nobody, for that matter. But I'm quite sure that men are brothers. Women never are sisters."

"I don't think that those of us who are capable of sisterhood will agree with you." Imogen's smile turned on Mary another coal of fire, for she suspected Mary of apostasy. "I don't think that you can understood sisterhood at all, as, for instance, Mary and I do."

"Oh, you and Mary!" Rose tapped her egg-shell and salted her egg. "That's not sisterhood; that's prophetess and proselyte. You're an anarchist to the bone, Imogen, like the rest of us; you couldn't bear to share anything. It's like children playing games: If I can't be the driver, I won't play horses."

"Oh, Rose!" came in distressed tones from Mary; but Imogen did not flinch from her serenity.

Outside on the verandah, where they all wandered after breakfast, her moment came at last. Jack had walked away with Mary, Miss Bocock, with a newspaper, stood in the shade at a little distance. Rose

and Eddy were wandering among the flowers. Imogen knew, as she found herself alone with Sir Basil, that the impulse that rose in her was the crude one of simply snatching. She controlled its demonstration, so that only a certain breathlessness was in her voice, a certain brilliancy in her eye, as she said to him, rapidly :

" He will never let you see me ! Never ! "

" He ? Who ? What do you mean ? " Sir Basil, startled, stared at her.

" Jack ! Jack ! Haven't you noticed ? "

" Oh, I see. Yes, I see." His glance became illuminated. In a voice as low as her own he asked : " What does it mean ? I never can get a word with you. He's always there. He's very devoted to you, I know ; but I supposed that—well, that his chance was over."

His hesitation, the appeal of his glance, were lightning-flashes of assurance for Imogen opening her path for her.

" It is over ; it is over ;—but it's false that he is devoted to me," she whispered. " He hates me. He is my enemy."

Her brilliant eyes were on him and a further " Oh ! " came from Sir Basil as he received this long ray of illumination. And it was so dazzling, although Imogen, after her speech, had cast down her eyes, revealing nothing more, that he murmured hastily : " Can't I see you, Imogen, alone ; can't you arrange it in some way ? "

Imogen's eyes were still cast down, while, the purpose that was like a possession, once attained, her thoughts rushed in, accused, exculpated, a wild confusion. She hadn't spoken falsely, though it had been

with the blindness of the overmastering purpose. Jack did hate her. And her dignity was untarnished in Sir Basil's eyes, for, she had seen it at last, her path was open ; she had only to enter it. Her heart seemed to flutter in her throat as she said on the lowest, most incisive note, " Yes, I, too, want to see you, Sir Basil. I am so lonely ; you are the only one who cares, who understands, who is near me. There must be real truth between us. This morning—he has prevented that. But to-night, after we have all gone upstairs, come out again by the little door at the back, and meet me—meet me——" her voice wavered a little, " at the rustic bench, up in the woods, where we went last night. There we can talk." And catching suddenly at all the nobility so threatened in her own eyes, remembering her love for him, her great love, and his need, his great need, of her, she smiled deeply, proudly at him, and said : " We will see each other, at last, and each other's truth, under God's stars."

CHAPTER XXVI

JACK had drawn Mary aside, round the sunny verandah, and, out of ear-shot of everybody, a curious intentness in his demeanour, he asked her to run up to Mrs. Upton's room and ask her if she wouldn't take a drive with him that morning. Since the Upton's impoverishment their little stable was, perforce, empty, and it was Jack who ordered the "buggy" from the village and treated the company in turn to daily drives.

Mary departed on her errand, hearing Jack telephoning to the livery-stable as she went upstairs.

She had to own to herself that the charm had grown on her, and the fact of her increasing fondness for Imogen's mother made the clearer to her all the new, vague pain in regard to Imogen. Imogen, to Mary's delicate perception of moral atmosphere, was different; she had felt it from the moment of her arrival. No one had as yet enlightened her as to the Potts catastrophe, but even with the interpretation it offered she would have found the change hard to understand. Perhaps it was merely that she, Mary, was selfish and felt herself to be of less importance to Imogen. Mary was always conscious of relief when she could fix responsibility upon herself and she was adjusting all sorts of burdens on her conscience as she knocked at Mrs. Upton's door.

The post had just arrived and Valerie, standing near her dressing table, was reading her letters as Mary came in. Mary had never so helplessly felt the sense of charm as this morning.

She wore a long white dressing-gown of frilled lawn, tied with black ribbons at throat and wrists. Her abundant chestnut hair, delicately veined with white, was braided into two broad plaits that hung below her waist, and her face, curiously childlike so seen, was framed in the banded masses. Mary could suddenly see what she had looked like as a little girl. So moved was she by the charm that, Puritan as she was, she found herself involuntarily saying—"Oh, Mrs. Upton, what beautiful hair you have."

"It is nice, isn't it," said Valerie, looking more than ever like a child, a pleased child. "I love my hair."

Mary had taken one braid and was crunching it softly, like spun silk, in her hand. She couldn't help laughing out at the happy acceptance of her admiring speech; the charm was about her; she understood; it wasn't vanity, but something flower-like.

"You have heaps, too," said Valerie.

"Oh, but it's sand-coloured. And I do it so horribly. It is so heavy and pulls back so."

"I know, that's the difficulty with heaps of hair. But I had a very clever maid and she taught me how to manage it. Sand-colour is a lovely colour as a background to the face, you know."

Valerie rarely made personal remarks and rarely paid compliments. She had none of the winning allurements of the siren; Mary had realized that and was now

realizing that genuine interest, even if reticent, may be the most fragrant of compliments.

"I wish you would let me show you how to do it," Valerie added.

Mary blushed. There had always been to her, in her ruthless hair-dressing, an element of severe candour, the recognition of charmlessness, a sort of homage paid to wholesome if bitter fact. Mrs. Upton wasn't, in her flowerlike satisfaction, one bit vain, but Mary suspected herself of feeling a real thrill of tempted vanity. The temptation, however, came in a form too sweet to be resisted, and Mrs. Upton's hair was done so simply, though done, she suspected, with a touch of guile in the simplicity. It wouldn't look vain to do it like that; but, on the other hand it would probably take three times as long to do; there was always the question of one's right to employ precious moments in personal adornment. "How kind of you," she murmured. "I am so stupid, though. Could I really learn? And wouldn't it take up a good deal of my time every morning?"

Valerie smiled. "Well, it's a nice way of spending one's time don't you think."

This was, somehow, quite unanswerable and Mary had never thought of it in that light. She sat down before Valerie's pretty, tipped mirror and looked with some excitement at the rows of glittering toilet utensils set out before her. She was sure that Mrs. Upton found it nice to spend a great deal of time before her mirror.

"It is so kind of you," she repeated. "And it will be so interesting to see how you do it. And, oh I am forgetting the thing I came for—how stupid, how wrong of me. It's a message from Jack. He wants to know if you will drive with him."

"And what are all the plans for to-day?" Mrs. Upton asked irrelevantly, unpinning the clustered knobs at the back of Mary's head and softly shaking out the stringently twisted locks as she uncoiled them.

"It is *so* kind of you; but oughtn't I to take Jack his answer first?"

"The answer will wait. He has his letters to see to now. What are they all doing?"

"Well, let me see, Rose is in the hammock and Eddy is talking to her. Imogen is going to take Miss Bocock to see her club."

"Oh, it is Imogen's club day, is it? She asked Miss Bocock?"

"Miss Bocock asked her, or, rather Jack told her that he had been telling Miss Bocock about it; it was Jack who asked. He knew, of course, that she would be interested in it—a big, fine person like Miss Bocock would be bound to be."

"Um." Valerie seemed vaguely to consider as she passed the comb down the long tresses. "I don't think that I can let Imogen carry off Miss Bocock; Miss Bocock can go to the club another day; I want to do some gardening with her this morning; she's a very clever gardener, did you know? So I shall be selfish. Imogen can take Sir Basil; he likes walks."

Mrs. Upton was now brushing, and very dexterously; but Mary, glancing at her with a little anxiety for the avowed selfishness, fancied that she was not thinking much about the hair. Mary could not quite interpret the change she felt in the lovely face. Something hard, something controlled was there.

"But Jack?" she questioned.

"Well, Jack can take you on the drive. You and he have seen very little of each other since you've come; such old friends as you are, too."

"Yes, we are," said Mary, gazing abstractedly at her own face now in the mirror, and forgetting both her own transformation and the face that bent above her. A familiar cloud of pain gathered within her, and suddenly she found herself bursting out with: "Oh, Mrs. Upton, I am so unhappy about Jack!"

Valerie, in the mirror, gave her a keen, quick glance. "I am, too, Mary," she said.

Mary, at this, turned in her chair to look up at her. "You see, you feel it, too!"

"That *he* is unhappy? Yes, I see and feel it."

"And you care; I am sure that you care."

"I care very much. I love Jack very much."

Mary seized her hand and tears filled her eyes. "Oh, you *are* a dear! One must love him when one really knows him, mustn't one? Mrs. Upton, I've known Jack all my life and he is simply one of the noblest, deepest, realest people in the whole world."

"I am sure of that."

"Well, then, can't you help him?" Mary cried.

"How can I help him? In what way?" Valerie asked, her grave smile fading.

"With Imogen. It's that, you see, their alienation, that's breaking his heart. Of course you've seen it all more clearly than I have," Mary went on, her hair about her face, her hand clasping Valerie's. "Of course you understand it, and everything that has happened to them. I love Imogen too—please don't doubt that—but—but I can't but feel that it's *her* mistake, *her* blindness that has been the cause. She couldn't accept it, you see, that he should—stand for a new thing, and be loyal to the old thing at the same time."

Valerie now had sunken into a chair near Mary's

and one hand was still in Mary's hand, and in the other she still held a tress of Mary's hair. She looked down at this tress while she said: "But Imogen was right, quite right. He couldn't stand for the new thing and be loyal to the old."

Mary's eyes widened. "You mean, Mrs. Upton—?"

"Just what you do. That *I* am the cause."

She raised her eyes to Mary's and the girl became scarlet.

"Oh, you do see it all," she breathed.

"All, all, Mary. To Imogen I stand, I must stand, for the wrong; to Jack—though he can't think of me very well as 'standing' for anything—I'm not altogether in that category. So that his championship of me judges him in Imogen's eyes. Imogen has had a great deal to bear. Have you heard of the last thing? She has not told you? I have refused my consent to her having a biography of her father written. She had set her heart on it."

"Oh, I hadn't heard anything. You wouldn't consent? Oh, poor Imogen!"

"It is poor Imogen. In this, too, she has found no sympathy in Jack. All his sympathy is with me. It has been the end for both of them. And it is inevitable, Mary."

"Oh, Mrs. Upton, what can I say—what can I think? I don't seem to be able to see who is right and who is wrong?" Mary covered the confusion of her thoughts by burying her face in her hands.

"No; one can't see. That's what one finds out."

"Of course I have always thought Mr. Upton a very wonderful person," Mary murmured from behind her hands, her Puritan instinct warning her that now, when it gave her such pain, was the time above all

others for a "testifying," a "bearing witness." "But I know that Jack never felt about that as I did. Of course I, too, think that the biography ought to be written."

Valerie was silent and her silence, Mary felt, was definitive. She wouldn't explain herself; she wouldn't seek self-exculpation; and while, with all her humility, Mary felt that as a little stinging, she felt it, also, as something of a relief. Mrs. Upton, no doubt, was indifferent as to her opinion of her rightness and her wrongness and Mrs. Upton—there was the comfort of it—was a person whom one must put on one side when it came to judgments. She didn't seem to belong to any of the usual categories. One didn't want to judge her. One was thankful for the haze she made about herself and her motives. That Jack understood her was, Mary felt sure, the result of some peculiar perspicacity of Jack's, for she didn't believe that Mrs. Upton had ever explained or exculpated herself to Jack, either. It even dawned on her that his perspicacity perhaps consisted mainly in the sense of trust that she herself was experiencing. She trusted Mrs. Upton, were she right, or were she wrong, and there was an end of it. With that final realization she uncovered her eyes and met her hostess's eyes again, eyes so soft, so clear, but with a look of suffering in them. Childlike, her hair folding behind her cheek and neck, she was faded, touched with age; Mary had never seen it so clearly. Somehow it made her even sorrier than the suffering she recognized.

"Oh, but it's been hard for you, too," she exclaimed, shyly but irrepressibly, "everything; all of it. Just let me say that."

Valerie had blushed her infrequent, vivid blush.

She rose and came behind Mary's chair, again gathering up the abandoned tresses. But before she began to comb and coil she said, "Thanks," leaning forward and very lightly kissing the girl's forehead.

After that there was silence between them while the work of hairdressing went on. Valerie did not speak again until, softly forming the contour of the transfigured head, she said, looking at Mary's reflection with an air of quiet triumph: "Now, is not that charming?"

"Charming, perfectly charming," Mary replied vaguely, the tears were near her eyes.

"You must come again to-morrow, and do it under my supervision. It only needs this now." She thrust two heavy tortoiseshell pins into the coils on either side of Mary's head.

"Those beautiful pins! I am afraid I shall lose them!"

"But they are yours—mementoes of the new era in hairdressing. I have several of them. There, you are quite as I would have you, as far as your head goes."

"Not as far as the rest of me goes, I'm afraid," said Mary, laughing in spite of herself, and lured from sadness.

"I wish you'd let me make the rest of you to match," said Valerie. "I've always loved dressing people up. I loved dressing my dolls when I was a child. That stiff shirt doesn't go with your head."

"No, it doesn't. I really don't see," said Mary tentatively, "why one shouldn't regard dressing as a form of art; I mean, of course, as long as one keeps it in its proper place as it were."

"To get it in its proper place is to dress well, don't you think. I found such a pretty lawn dress of mine

in a trunkful of things put away here, it's a little too juvenile for me now, and, besides, I'm in mourning. May I put you into it ? "

" But I should feel so odd, so frivolous. I'm such a staid, solemn person."

" But the dress is staid, too, a dear little austerity of a dress ; it's just as much you as that way of doing your hair is. Don't imagine that I would commit such a solecism as to dress you frivolously. Look, will you put this on at once—to please me ? "

She had drawn the delicate thing, all falls and plaitings of palest blue, from a closet and, shaking it out, looked up with quite serious eyes of supplication. It was impossible not to yield. Laughing, frightened, charmed, Mary allowed Mrs. Upton to dress her and then surveyed herself in the long mirror with astonishment. She couldn't but own that it was herself, though such a transfigured self. She didn't feel out of place, though she felt new and strange.

" Now, Mary, go down to them and see to it that they all do as I say," Valerie insisted. " Imogen is to take Sir Basil to the club ; Miss Bocock is to garden with me—tell her particularly that I count upon her. Jack is to take you for a drive, and, Mary," she put her hand for a moment on the girl's shoulder, grave for all her recovered lightness, " you are not to talk of sad things to Jack—you must help me about Jack. You must cheer him—make him forget. You must talk of all the things you used to talk of before—before either I or Imogen came."

They were all on the verandah when Mary went down, all, that is, but Rose and Eddy. Sir Basil and Miss Bocock were deep in letters. Imogen, seated on a step, the sunlight playing over her fluttering

black, endured (it was evident that enjoyment made no part of her feeling), a vivid and emphatic account from Jack of some recent political occurrence. He was even reading, here and there, bits from the newspaper he held, and Mary fancied that there was an unnatural excitement in his voice, an unusual eagerness in his eye, with neither of which had he in the least infected Imogen.

On seeing Mary appear he dropped the newspaper and joined her in the hall, drawing her from there into the little library. "Well? Well?" he questioned keenly.

He had no eyes for her transformation, Mary noted that, although Imogen, in the instant of her appearance, had fixed grave and astonished eyes upon her. She repeated her message.

"Well, do you know," said Jack, "we can't obey her. I'm so sorry; I should have liked the drive with you, Mary, of all things, but it turns out that I can't take anybody this morning. I've some letters, just come, that must be answered by return. But, Mary, see here," his voice dropped and his keenness became more acute—"help me about it. See that she goes. She needs it."

"Needs it?"

"Don't you see that she's worn out?"

"Jack, only this morning, I've begun to suspect it; what is the matter?"

"Everything. Everything is the matter. So she mustn't be allowed to take all the drudgery on her hands. Miss Bocock may go to the club with Imogen, she's just ready to go, she wants to go; and Mrs. Upton must have the drive with Sir Basil. He'd far rather drive with her than walk with Imogen," said Jack brazenly.

"I suppose so, they are such great friends—only—drudgery? She likes Miss Bocock. She likes gardening." Mary's breath was almost taken away by his terse decisiveness.

"She likes Sir Basil better," Jack said it in the freest manner, a manner that left untouched any deeper knowledge that they might both be in possession of. "Imogen likes him better, too. It's for that, so that Imogen may have the best of it, that she's taking Miss Bocock off Imogen's hands; you see, I see that you do. So you just stay here and keep still about your counter-commands, while I manage it."

"But, Jack, you bewilder me! I ought to give my message. I hate managing."

"I'll see that your message is given."

"But how can you? Jack, what *are* you planning?"

He was going and, with almost an impatience of her Puritan scruples, he paused at the door to reply: "Don't bother. I'm all right. I won't manage it. I'll simply *have* it so."

Half an hour later Valerie came downstairs wearing her white hat with its black ribands and drawing on her gardening gloves. And in the large, cool hall, holding his serviceable letters, Jack awaited her.

"I hope you won't mind," he announced, but in the easiest tones, "we can't obey you this morning. Miss Bocock's gone off to the club with Imogen, and Sir Basil is going to take you for a drive."

Valerie, standing on the last step of the stair, a little above him, paused in the act of adjusting her glove, to stare at him. Easy as his tone was he couldn't hide from her that he wore a mask.

"Was Mary too late to give my message?"

"Yes; that is, no, not exactly, but the club had

been arranged and Miss Bocock was eager about it and knew you wouldn't mind, especially as Sir Basil set his heart on the drive with you, when he heard that I couldn't go."

"That you couldn't go? but you sent Mary to ask me."

"I had to waive my claim. I've just had these letters," he held them up. "Very important; they must be answered at once, it will take all my morning, and, of course, when Sir Basil heard that, he jumped at his chance." Valerie was still on the step above him, fully illuminated and as, with that careful ease, he urged Sir Basil's eagerness upon her, he saw—with what a throb of the heart, for her, for himself—that her deep flush rose.

Oh, she loved him. She couldn't conceal it, not from the eyes that watched her now. And was she glad of an unasked-for help, or did her pride suspect help and resent it? Above all, did she know how in need of help she was?

He hadn't been able to prevent his eyes from turning from the blush; they avowed, he feared, the consciousness that he would hide; but, after a little moment, in the same voice of determined, though cautious penetration, Valerie questioned: "Is Imogen just gone?"

"She has been gone these fifteen minutes," said Jack, striving to conceal triumph.

"And Mary?"

"Mary?"

"Yes, where is Mary? Is she left out of all your combinations?"

She did probe, then, though her voice was so mild, the voice only of the slightly severe, slightly displeased hostess who finds her looms entangled.

"Mary always has a lot to do."

"Sir Basil shall take Mary," said Valerie cheerfully, as though she picked up the thread and found a way out of the silly chaos of his making. And at this crisis, this check from the goddess who wouldn't be served, Jack's new skill rose to an almost sinister height. Without a flaw in their apparent candour, his eyes met hers while he said: "Please don't upset my little personal combination. It's very selfish of me, I know; but I wanted to keep Mary for myself this morning. I've seen so little of her of late, and I need her to talk over my letters with; they're about things we are both interested in."

Valerie looked fixedly at him while he made this statement and he couldn't tell what her look meant. But evidently she yielded to his counter-strategem, feeling it, no doubt, unavoidable, for the buggy just then drew up before the door, and the figure of Sir Basil appeared above.

"'I *am* in luck!" said Sir Basil. Excitement as well as eagerness was visible in him. Valerie did not look up at him, though she smiled vaguely, coming down from her step and selecting a parasol on her way to the door. Jack was beside her and he saw that the flush still stayed. He seemed to see, too, that she was excited and eager, but, more than all, that she was frightened. Yet she kept for him her quiet voice.

Before Sir Basil joined them she had time to say: "You are rather mysterious, Jack. If you have deep-laid plans, I would rather you paid me the compliment of showing me the deepest of them at once. I am not being nasty to you," she smiled faintly. "Find Mary at once; you must have wasted a lot of time already in getting to those letters."

Jack stood in the doorway while they drove off. Valerie, though now very pale, in the shadow of her hat, showed all her gay tranquillity, and she was very lovely. Sir Basil must see that. He must see that, and all the other things, that, perhaps, he had forgotten for a foolish moment.

Jack felt himself this morning in a category where he had never thought it possible that he should find himself. It was difficult to avoid the conviction that he had simply lied two or three times in order to send Mrs. Upton and Sir Basil off together in their long, swaying, sunny solitude. Jack had never imagined it possible that he should lie. But observing, as he was forced to, the blot on his neat, clean conscience, he found himself considering it without a qualm. His only qualm was for its success. The drive would justify him. He almost swore it to himself, as Valerie's parasol disappeared among the trees. The drive would justify him, and reinstate Sir Basil. Unless Sir Basil were a fool, what he had done was well done.

Yet, when they had disappeared, it was with the saddest drop to anxious, to gnawing uncertainty, that Jack turned back into the house. An echo of the fear that he had felt in Valerie, seemed to float back to him. It was as if, in some strange way, he had handed her over to pain rather than to joy, to sacrifice rather than to attainment.

CHAPTER XXVII

JACK'S morning was not a happy one. It was bad enough to have told so many fibs, or, at all events, to have invented so many opportune truths, and it was worse to have to go on inventing more of them to Mary, now that his dexterities had linked him to her.

Mary looked, as was only too natural, much surprised when he told her that his letters required her help. She looked still more so when she found how inadequate were their contents to account for such a claim.

Indeed there was, apparently, but one letter upon which her advice could be of the least significance and after she had given him all the information she had to give in regard to the charity it appealed for, there was really nothing more for them to do.

"But the letters that required the immediate answers?" she asked.

Jack's excited, plausible manner had dropped from him. Mary felt it difficult to be severe when his look of dejection was piercing her heart; still, she felt that she owed it to him as well as to herself, she must see a little more clearly into how he had "had things so."

He replied, his eye neither braving nor evading hers, that he had already answered them, and Mary, after a little pause, in which she studied her friend's face, said: "I don't understand you this morning, Jack."

"I'm afraid you'll understand me less when I make

you a confession. I didn't give your message this morning, Mary."

Didn't give Mrs. Upton's message, to Miss Bocock, to Sir Basil ? "

" No," said Jack, but with more mildness and sadness than compunction. " I want to be straight with you, at all events. So I'd rather tell you. All I did was to say to Sir Basil that I found I couldn't take Mrs. Upton for the drive I'd promised, so that if he wanted to take my place, he was welcome to the buggy. He wanted to, of course. That went without saying."

" Why, Jack Pennington ! "

" Miss Bocock, luckily, was on the other side of the verandah, so that I had only to go round to her afterwards and tell her that Mrs. Upton had suggested their gardening. I did tell her that ; but I went on to say that since Mrs. Upton was going to drive with Sir Basil she could go off to the club, at once, with Imogen."

" But, Jack !—what did you mean by it ? " Mary, quite aghast, stared at her Machievellian friend.

" Why, that Sir Basil should take her. That's all I meant from the beginning, when I proposed going myself. Do forgive me, you dear old brick. You see, I'm so awfully set on her not being done out of things."

" Done out of things ? "

" Oh, little things, if you like, young things. She's young, and she ought to have them. Say you forgive me."

" Of course, Jack, dear, I forgive you, though I don't understand you. But that's not the point. Everything seems so queer, so twisted ; every one seems different. And to find *you* not straight is worst of all."

" I promise you, it's my last sin," said Jack.

Mary, though shaking her bewildered head, had to smile a little, and, the smile encouraging him to lightness, he remarked on her changed aspect.

" So do forgive and forget. I had to confess, when I'd not been true, to you. Really, my nature isn't warped. What an extremely becoming dress that is, Mary ; and what have you done to your hair ? "

" It's *she,*" said Mary, flushing with pleasure.

" Mrs. Upton ? "

" Yes, she did my hair and gave me the dress. She was so sweet and dear."

Jack lightly touched a plaited ruffle of the wide sleeve, and Mary felt that he had never less thought of her than when he so touched her dress. She put aside the deep little pang that gave her to say :

" It's true, Jack, she ought to have young things, just because they are going from her ; one feels that. She oughtn't to be standing back, giving up, yet. I see a little what you mean. *Isn't* it pretty ? "—still with an absent hand, he lightly touched, here and there, a ruffle of her sleeve. " But it's like her. I hardly feel myself in it."

" You've never so looked yourself," said Jack. " That's what she does, brings out people's real selves."

Mrs. Upton and Sir Basil did not come back to lunch and Imogen's face was sombre indeed as she faced her guests at the table. Jack, vigilant and pitiless, guessed at the turmoil of her soul.

She asked him, with an icy sweetnesss, how his letters had prospered. " Did you get them all off ? "

Jack said that he had and Mary, casting a wavering glance at him, saw that if he intended to sin no more, he showed, at all events, a sinful guilelessness of

demeanour. She herself began to blush so helplessly and so furiously that Imogen's attention was drawn to her. Imogen, also, was vigilant.

"And what have you been doing, Mary dear?" she asked.

"I—oh——" poor Mary looked the sinful one. "I—helped Jack a little."

"Helped Jack? Oh, yes, he had heaps of letters, hadn't he? What were they all about, Mary?"

"Oh, charities."

"Charities? What charities? How many charities? I'm interested in that, you know—I'm rather hurt that you didn't ask my advice, too," and Imogen smiled her ominous smile. "What were the charities?"

Mary, crimson to the brow, her eyes on her plate, now did her duty.

"There was only one."

"One? And that of such consequence that Jack had to give up his drive because of it?—what an interesting letter"

"There were other letters, of course," Jack, in aid of his innocent accomplice, struck in. "None that would have particularly interested you, Imogen. I only needed advice about the one, a local Boston affair."

"There were others, Mary," said Imogen, laughing a little. "You needn't look so guilty on Jack's account." Mary gave her a wide startled stare.

"You see, Mary," said Rose, after lunch in the drawing-room, "saints can sting."

"What was the matter?" Mary murmured, her head still seemed to buzz, as though from a violent box on the ear. "I never heard Imogen speak like that. To *hurt* one!"

"I fancy she'd been getting thwarted in some way,"

said Rose comfortably, "saints do sting, then, sometimes, the first thing that happens to be at hand. How Jack and she hate each other."

Mary went away to her room and cried.

Meanwhile Jack wandered about in the woods until, quite late in the afternoon, he saw from the rustic bench, where, finally, he had cast himself, the returning buggy climbing up through the lower woodlands.

He felt that his heart throbbed heavily as he watched it, just catching glimpses, among the trees, of the white bubble of Valerie's parasol slanting against the sun. Yet there was a dullness in his excitement. It was over, at all events. He was sure that the last die was cast. And his own trivial and somewhat indecorous part of shifter of scenes and puller of strings, was, he felt sure, a thing put by for ever. He could help her no longer. And in a sort of apathy, he sat on there in the sunny green, hardly thinking, hardly wondering, conscious only of a hope that had become a mere physical sense of oppression and of an underlying sadness that had become almost a physical sense of pain.

He had just consulted his watch and, seeing it wanted but ten minutes to tea-time, had got up and was moving away, when a sudden rustle near him, a pause, a quick, evasive footstep, warned him of some presence as anxious for solitude as himself.

He stood still for a moment, uncertain as to his own best means of retreat, but his stillness misled, for, in another moment, Valerie appeared before him from among the branches of a narrow side path.

She had come up to the woods directly ; he saw that, for she still wore her hat : she had come to be alone and to weep ; and, as she saw Jack, her pale face was con-

vulsed, with the effort to control her weeping, into a strange rigor of pain and confusion.

"Oh," he stammered. "Forgive me. I didn't know you were here." He was turning to flee as if from a sacrilege, when she recalled him.

"Don't—without me. I must go back too," she said.

She stepped into the broader path and joined him, and he guessed that she was testing on him her power to face the others. But, after they had gone a few steps together, she stopped suddenly and put her hands before her face, standing quite still.

And Jack understood that she was helpless and that he must say nothing. She stood so for a long moment, not trusting herself to move or speak. Then, uncovering her face, she showed him strange eyes from which the tears had been crushed back.

"And—I can do nothing?" he said at last, in the lowest breath. They walked on.

"Nothing, dear Jack."

"When you are suffering like that!"

"I have no right to such suffering. I must hide it. Help me to hide it, Jack. Do I look fairly decent?" She turned her face to him with, he thought, the most valorous smile he had ever seen.

Only a thin screen of leaves was between them and the open.

"You look—beautiful," said Jack. She smiled on, as though that satisfied her, and he added; "Can I know nothing? see nothing?"

"I think already," said Valerie, "that you see more than I ever meant any one to see."

"I? I see nothing, now," he almost moaned.

"You shall. I'll talk to you later."

"You will? If only you knew how I cared!"

"I do, dear Jack."

"Not how much, not how much. You can't know that. It almost gives me my right, you know, to see. When will you talk to me?"

"Some time to-night, when we can have a quiet moment. I'll tell you about the things that have happened—nothing to make you sad, I hope. And I'll ask you some questions too, Jack, about your very odd behaviour!"

Really she was wonderful; it was almost her own gaiety, flickering like pale sunlight upon her face, that she had regained and, as they went together over the lawn to where the tea-table was laid in the shade, he saw that she could face them all. No one would know. And her last words had given him heart, had lifted, a little, the heavy weight of foreboding. Perhaps, perhaps, her grief wasn't for herself. "Oh, but I can't be candid till you are," he said, the new hope shining in his eyes.

"Oh, yes, you will be," she returned. "You won't ask me to be candid. You'll give and not ask to get back. I know you, Jack."

No one could guess, Sir Basil least of all. That was apparent to Jack as he watched them all sitting at tea under the apple-trees. Sir Basil had never looked so radiant, so innocent of any connexion with suffering. He exclaimed over the beauties of their long drive. They had crossed hill and dale; they had lost their way; they had had lunch at a village hotel, an amusing lunch, ending with ice cream and pie, and, from the undiminished reflection of his contentment on Valerie's features, Jack knew that any faintest hint of the pale, stricken anguish of the woodlands had never for an

instant hovered during the drive. This was the face that Sir Basil had seen for all the happy, sunny, picnic day, this face of gay tranquillity.

Sir Basil and Mrs. Upton, indeed, expressed what gaiety there was among the group. Mary, in her blue lawn, looked very dreary. Rose and Eddy were ill-tempered, their day, plainly, having ended in a quarrel. As for Imogen, Jack had felt her heavy eye rest upon him and her mother as they came together over the lawn, and felt it rest upon her mother and Sir Basil, steadily and sombrely, while they sat about the tea-table. The long drive, Sir Basil's radiance, her mother's serenity, how must they look to Imogen? Jack could conjecture, though knowing, for his own bitter mystification, that what they looked like was perhaps not what they meant. Imogen must be truly at bay, and he felt a cruel satisfaction in the thought of her hidden, her gnawing anxiety. He was aware of every ring of falsity in her placid voice and of every flash of fierceness under the steeled calmness of her eye. He noticed too, for the rest of the day, that, whatever Imogen's desperation, she made no effort to see Sir Basil alone. Almost ostentatiously she went away to her room after tea, saying that she had had bad news of an invalid *protégée* and must write to her. She paused, as she went, to lean over Mary, a caressing hand upon her shoulder, and to speak to her in a low tone. Mary grew very red, stammered, and said nothing.

"Miss Upton overworks, I think," observed Miss Bocock. "I've thought that she seemed overstrained all day."

Mary had risen too, and as she wandered away into the flower garden Jack followed her. "See here," he said, "has Imogen been hurting you again?"

"No, Jack, oh no; I'm sure she doesn't mean to hurt."

"What did she say to you just now?"

"Well, Jack, you did bring it upon yourself and upon me."

"What was it?"

"She said that she couldn't bear to see her white flower—that's me, you know"—Mary blushed even deeper in repeating the metaphor—"used for unworthy ends. She meant, of course, I see that—she meant that what she said at lunch was for you and not for me. I'm sure that Imogen *means* to be kind—always."

"I believe she does."

"I'm glad that you feel that too, Jack. It is so horrible to see oneself as—oh, really, disloyal sometimes."

"You need never feel that, Mary."

"Oh, but I do. And now, when everything, every one seems turning against Imogen! And she has seemed different; yet for two years she has been a revelation of everything noble to me."

"You only saw her in noble circumstances."

"Oh, Jack," Mary's eyes were full of tears as she looked at him, "that's the worst of all; that you have come to speak of her like that."

CHAPTER XXVIII

EVEN Valerie couldn't dispel the encompassing cloud of gloom at dinner. There was not much to be done in such a fog but drift with it. And Jack saw that she was fit for no more decisive action.

Imogen, pale, and almost altogether silent, said that she was very tired and went upstairs early. Rose and Eddy, in a shaded corner of the drawing-room, engaged in a long altercation. The others talked in desultory fashion till bedtime. No one seemed fit for anything more than drifting.

It was hardly eleven when Jack was left alone with Mrs. Upton.

"You are tired too," he said to her; "dreadfully tired. I mustn't ask for our talk."

"I should like a little stroll in the moonlight." Valerie, at the open window, was looking out. "In a night or two it will be too late for us to see. We'll have our walk and our talk, Jack."

She rang for her white chuddah, told the maid to put out the lamps and that she and Mr. Pennington would shut the house when they came in. From the darkened house they stepped into the warm, pale night.

They went in silence over the lawn and, with no sense of choice, took the mossy path that led to the rustic bench where they had met that afternoon.

It was not until they were lost in the obscurity of

the woods that Valerie said very quietly: "Do you remember our talk, Jack, on that evening in New York, after the tableaux?"

He had followed along the path just behind her, but now he came to her side so that he could see her shadowy face. "Yes: the evening in which we saw that Imogen and Sir Basil were going to be friends."

"And the evening," said Valerie, "when you showed me plainly, at last, that because I seemed gold to you, Imogen's blue had turned to green."

"Yes; I remember."

"It has faded further and further away, her blue, hasn't it?"

"Yes," he confessed.

"So that you are hardly friends, Jack?"

He paused for a moment, and then completed his confession: "We are not friends."

Valerie stood still, breathing as if with a little difficulty after the gradual ascent. The tall trees about them were dark and full of mystery on the pale mysterious sky. Through the branches they could see the glint of the moon's diminished disk.

"That is terrible, you know," said Valerie, after they had stood in silence for some moments.

"I know it."

"For both of you."

"Worse for me, because I cared more, really cared more."

"No, worse for her, for it is you who have judged and rejected her."

"She thinks that it is she who has judged and rejected me."

"She tries to think it; she does not always succeed. It has been bitter, it has been cruel for her."

"Oh yes, bitter and cruel," he assented.

"Don't try to minimise her pain, Jack."

"You feel that I can't care, much?"

"It is horrible for me to feel it. Think of her when I came, so secure, so calm, so surrounded by love and appreciation. And now——" Valerie walked on, as if urged to motion by the controlled force of her own insistence. Was it an appeal to him that Imogen, dispossessed of the new love, might find again the old love opening to her? He clung to the hope, though with a sickening suspicion of its folly.

"By my coming, I have robbed her of everything," Valerie was saying, walking swiftly up the path and breathing as if with that slight difficulty—the sound of her breaths affected him with an almost intolerable sense of expectancy. "She isn't secure; she isn't calm. She is warped; her faiths are warped. Her friends are changed to her. She has lost you. It's as if I had shattered her life."

"Everything that wasn't real you have shattered."

The rustic bench was reached and they paused there, though with no eyes for the shaft of mystic distance that opened before them. Jack's eyes were on her, and he was conscious of a rising insistence in himself that matched and opposed her own.

"But you must be sorry for her pain," said Valerie, and now with eyes almost stern in their demand she gazed at him. "You must be sorry that she has had to lose so much. And you would be glad, would you not, to think that real things, a new life, were to come to her?"

He understood; even before the words, his fear, his presage, leaped forward to this crashing together of all his hopes. And it seemed to him that a flame

passed through him, shrivelling in its ardent wrath all slight reticences and decorums.

"No, no; I should not be glad," he answered. His voice was violent, the eyes he fixed on her were violent. His words struck Imogen out of his life for ever.

"Why are you so cruel?" she faltered.

"I am cruel for *you*. I know what you want to do. You are going to give her *your* life."

Quick as a flash she answered—it was like a rapier parrying his stroke: "Give?—what have I to do with it, if it comes to her?"

"Everything! Everything!" he cried.

"Nothing. You are mistaken."

"Ah, you could keep it, you could keep it—if you tried." And now his eyes pleaded, pleaded with her, for her own life's sake, to keep what was hers. "You have only to *show* her to him, as you did to me."

"You think—I could do that!—to my child!" Through the darkness her white face looked a wild reproach at him.

He seized her hands. "It's to do her no wrong! It's only to be true, consciously, to him, as you were true, unconsciously, to me. It's only, not to let her rob you—not to let her rob *him*."

"Jack," she breathed heavily, "these are things that cannot be said."

"They must—they must—now, between us. I have my right. I've cared enough—to do anything, so that she should not rob you!" Jack groaned.

"She has not robbed me. It left me; it went to her; I saw it all. Even if I had been base enough, even if I had tried to keep it by showing her to him—as you say so horribly—even then I should not have kept it. He would not have seen. Don't you under-

stand—he is not that sort of man. She will always be blue to him, and I shall always be gold—though perhaps, now, a little tarnished. That's what is so beautiful in him—and so stupid. He doesn't see colours as you and I do, Jack. That's what makes me sure that this is the happiest of fortunes for them both."

He had held her hands, gazing at her downcast face, its strength speaking from the shadow, its pain hidden from him, and now, before her resolution and her gentleness, he bent his head upon the hands he held. "Oh, but *you, you, you!* It's *you* whose life is shattered!" broke from him with a sob.

For a long while she stood silent above him, her hands enfolding his, as though she comforted his grief. He found himself at length kissing the gentle hands with tears, and then, caressing his bent head with a light touch, she said: "Don't you see that the time has come for me to accept shatterings as in the order of things, dear Jack? My mistake has been to believe that life can begin over again. It can't. One uses it up—merely by waiting. I've been an incurable girl till now—and now I've crashed from girlhood to middle-age in a week! It's been a crash, of course, the sort of crash one never mends of; but after to-day, after you sent me off with him, Jack, and I allowed myself, in spite of all my dread, my pride, my relinquishment, just one flicker of girlish hope—after all this, I think that I must put on caps to show that I am really old at last."

He lifted his head and looked at her. Her face was lovely, with the silver disk of the moon above it and, about it, the mystery and sadness of the tranquil woods—so lovely, so young, with almost the trembling touch of a tender mockery, like the trembling of

moonlit water, upon it. And all that he found to say at last was: "What a fool he is."

She really smiled then, though tears sprang to her eyes with her comprehension of all that the helpless, boyish words struggled to subdue.

"Thanks for that, dear Jack, and for all the other—mistakes," she said.

There seemed nothing more to say, no questions to ask, or to answer. He must accept from her that her plight was irrevocable. It was as if he had seen a great stone rolled over the quivering, springing, shining fountain, sealing it, stilling it for ever. And, for his part, her word covered all. His "mistakes" needed no further revealing.

They had turned and, in silence, were moving down the path again, when they heard, suddenly, the sound of light, swift footsteps approaching them.

Together they paused, exchanging a glance of wonder, and Jack thought that he saw fear in Valerie's eyes. The day already had held over much of endurance for her, and it was not yet ended. In another moment, tall and illumined, Imogen appeared before them in the path.

Jack knew, in thinking it over afterwards, that Imogen at her most baleful had been Imogen at her most beautiful. She had looked, as she emerged from the shadow, like a virgin saint bent on some wild errand through the night, an errand brought to a proud pause, in which was no fear and no hesitancy, as her path was crossed by the spirits of an evil world. That was really just what she looked like, standing there before them, bathed in light, her eyes profound and stern, her hair crowning her with a glory of transmuted gold, her head uplifted with a high, unfaltering purpose.

That the shock of finding them there before her was great, he saw at once, and he could gauge the strength of her purpose from her instantaneous surmounting of the shock.

And it was strange, in looking back, to remember how the time of colourless light and colourless shadow had seemed to divest them all of daily conventions and daily seemings. They might have been three disembodied souls met there in the moonlit woods and speaking the direct, unimpeded language of souls in which concealment is of no avail.

"Oh, it is *you*," was what Imogen said, much as the virgin saint might have greeted the familiar demons who opposed her quest. *You*, meant both of them. She put them together into one category of evil, saw them as one in their enmity to her and to good. And she seemed to accept them as very much what a saint might expect to find on such a nocturnal errand.

Involuntarily Valerie had fallen back, and she had put her hand on Jack's shoulder in confusion more than in fear. Yet, feeling a menace in the white shining presence, her voice faltered as she asked: "Imogen, what are you doing here?"

And it was at this point that Imogen reached, really, her own culmination. If she had felt any shame, any hesitation, any impulse to deceive when deception was so easy, to lie when a lie would have been so convincing, she rejected and triumphed over it now. Jack knew from her uplifted look that this would count with her always as one of her great moments, one of the moments in which—as she had used to say to him sometimes in the days that were gone for ever—one knew that one had "beat down Satan under one's feet."

"You have no right to ask me that," she said," but I choose to answer you. I have come here to meet Sir Basil."

"Meet him?" It was in pure bewilderment that Valerie questioned, helplessly, without reproach.

"Meet him. Yes. What have you to say to it?"

"But why meet him?—why now?" The wonder on Valerie's face had broken almost to merriment. "Did he ask you? Really, really, he oughtn't to. Really, my child, I can't have you meeting Sir Basil in the woods at midnight."

"You can't have me meeting him in the woods at midnight?" Imogen repeated, an ominous cadence, holding her head high and taking long breaths.

"You say that, dare say it, when you well know that I can meet him nowhere else and in no other way. It is *I* who asked him to meet me here, and it is here, confronted with you, if you so choose—it is here, before you and under God's stars, that I shall know the truth from him. I am not ashamed; I am proud to say it;—I love him. And though you scheme, and stoop and strive to take him from me—you, with Jack to help you, Jack to lie for you, as he did this morning—I know, I know in my heart and soul that he loves me, that he is mine."

"Jack! Jack!" Valerie cried. She caught him back, for he started forward to seize, to gag her daughter, "Jack, remember, remember! She doesn't understand!"

"Oh, he may strike me if he wills." Imogen had stood quite still, not flinching.

"I don't want to strike you——you—you idiot!" Jack was gasping. "I want to force you to your knees before your mother—who loves you—as no one

else who knows you will ever love you!" And, helplessly, his old words, so trite, so inadequate, came back to him. "You self-centred, you self-righteous, you cold-hearted girl!"

Valerie still held his arm with both hands, leaning upon him. "Imogen," she said, speaking quickly, "you needn't meet Sir Basil in this way; there is nothing to prevent you from seeing him where and when you will. You are right in believing that he loves you. He asked me this morning for your hand. And I gave him my consent."

From a virgin saint Imogen, as if by the wave of a wand, saw herself turned into a rather foolish genie, so transformed and then, ever so swiftly, run into a bottle; it was surely the fixing of a graceful seal thereto when she heard these words of conformity to the traditions of dignified bethrothal. And for once in her life, so bottled and so sealed, she looked, as if through the magic crystal of her mother's words, absolutely, helplessly foolish. It is difficult for a genie in a bottle to look contrite or stricken with anything deeper than astonishment, nor is it practicable in such a situation to fall upon your knees—if genii can feel such impulses to self-abasement. It was perhaps a comfort to all concerned, including a newcomer, that Imogen should be reduced to the silence of sheer stupefaction, and as Sir Basil appeared among them it was not at him, after her first wide glance, that she looked, but still, as if through the crystal bottle, at her mother, and the look was, at all events, a confession of utter inadequacy to deal with the situation in which she found herself.

It was Valerie, once more, who steered them all past the giddy whirlpool. Jack, beside her, his heart

and brain turning in dizzy circles, marvelled at her steadiness of eye, her clearness of voice. He would have liked to lean against a tree and get his breath ; but this delicate creature, rising from her rack, could move forward to her place beside the helm, and smile !

" Sir Basil," she said, and she put out her hand to him so mildly that Sir Basil may well have thought his rather uncomfortable *rendezvous* redeemed into happiest convention, " here we all are waiting for you, and here we are going to leave you, you and Imogen, to take a walk and to say some of all the things you will have to say to each other. Give me your hand, Imogen. There, dear friend, I think that it is yours, and I trust her life to you with my blessing. Now take your walk. I will wait for you, as late as you like, in the drawing-room."

So was the bottled genie released, so did it resume once more the figure of a girl, hardly humbled, yet, it must be granted, deeply confused. In perfect silence Imogen walked away beside her suitor, and it may be said that she never told him of the little episode that had preceded his arrival.

Jack and Valerie went slowly on towards the house. Now that she had grasped the helm through the whirlpool he almost expected that she would fall upon the deck. But silently she walked beside him, not taking his arm, wrapped closely in her shawl, and, once more inside the dark drawing-room, she proceeded to light the candles on the chimney-piece, saying that she would wait there until the others came in, smiling very faintly as she added, " that everything may be done properly and in order." Jack walked up and down the room, his hands deeply thrust into the pockets of his dining-jacket.

"As for you, you had better go to bed," Valerie went on after a moment. She had placed the candles on a table, taken a chair near them and chosen a review. She turned the pages while she spoke.

At this, he, too, being disposed of, he stopped before her. "And you wanted me to be glad!"

Her eyes on the unseen print, she turned her pages, and now that they were out of the woods and sursounded by walls and furniture and everyday symbols, he saw that the pressure of his presence was heavier, and that she blushed a deep, weary blush. But she was able and willing quite to dispose of him. "I want you to be glad," she answered.

"For her!" For that creature! his words implied.

"It was natural, what she thought," said Valerie, after a moment, though not looking up.

"Natural! To suspect you!"

"Of what you wanted me to do?" Valerie asked. "Yes, it was quite natural, I think, and partly because of your manoeuvres, my poor Jack. I understand it all now. But the cause you espoused was already a doomed one, you see."

"Oh!" he almost groaned, "*You* doomed it! Don't you feel any pity for *him*?"

Valerie continued to look at her page silently for a moment, and it was now indeed as though his question found some reverberating echo in herself. But in the silent moment she thought it out swiftly and surely, grasping old clues. "No, Jack," she said, and she was giving herself as well as him the final answer, "I don't pity him. He will never see Imogen baffled, warped, at bay, as we have. He will always see her crowned, successful, radiant. She will count tremendously over there, far more than I ever should,

because she's so different, because she cares such a lot. And Imogen must count to be radiant. She will help him in all sorts of ways, give him a new life; she will help everybody. Do you remember what Eddy said of her, that if it weren't for people of the Imogen type the cripples would die off like anything? That was true. She is one of the people who make the wheels of the world go round. And it's a revival for a man like Sir Basil to live with such a person. With me he would have faded back into the onlooker at life; with Imogen he will live. And then, above all, quite above all, he is in love with her. I think that he fell in love with her at first sight, as Antigone, at her loveliest, except for to-night. To-night was her very loveliest, because it was so real; she would have claimed him from me—before me—if he had come then, and her belief in herself, didn't you see, Jack, how it illumined her? And then, Jack, and this I'm afraid you are forgetting, Imogen is a good girl, a very good girl. I can trust him to her, you know. Her object in life will be to love him in the most glorious way possible. His happiness will be as much of an end to her as her own."

It was, perhaps, the culminating symptom of his initiation, of his transformation, when Jack, who had considered her while she spoke, standing perfectly still, his hands in his pockets, his head bent, his eyes steadily on her, now, finding nothing better to do than obey her first suggestion and go to bed, took her hand before going, put it to his lips—and his glance as he kissed her hand, brought the tears again to Valerie's eyes—and said: "Damn goodness."

CHAPTER XXIX

IMOGEN was, indeed, crowned and radiant. And safe on her eminence, recovered from the breathlessness of her rather unbecomingly vigorous ascent, she found her old serenity, her old benignity, safely enfolding her once more. In looking down upon the dusty lowlands, where she had been blind and bitter, she could afford to smile over herself, even to shake her head a little over the vehemence of her own fear and courage. It was to have lacked faith, to have lacked wisdom, the showing of such vehemence; yet, who knew, without it, perhaps, she might not have escaped the nets that had been laid for her feet, for Basil's feet, too, his strong and simple nature making him helpless before sly ambushes. Jack, in declaring himself her enemy, had effectually killed the last faint wailing that had so piteously, so magnanimously, sounded on for him in her heart. By his trickster's dexterity, he had proved to her, if she needed proof, that she had chosen the higher. A man who could so stoop—to lies—was not the man for her. To say nothing of his iniquity, his folly was apparent. For Jack had behaved like a fool, he must see that himself, in his espousal of a lost cause.

Jack as delinquent stood plain, and she would accuse no one else. In the bottom of Imogen's heart lingered, however, the suspicion that only when her

mother had seen the cause as lost, the contest as useless, had she hastily assumed the dignified attitude that, for the dizzy, moonlit moment, had so humiliatingly sealed her, Imogen, into the magic bottle. Imogen suspected that she hadn't been so wrong, nor her mother so magnanimous as had then appeared, and this secret suspicion made it the easier for her to accept the seeming, since to do that was to show herself anybody's equal in magnanimity. She was quite sure that her mother, in her shallow way, had cared for Basil, and not at all sure that she had relinquished her hope at the first symptom of his change of heart. But, though one couldn't but feel stern at the thought, one couldn't, also, repress something of pity for the miscalculation of the defeated love. To feel pity, moreover, was to show herself anybody's equal in heart: Jack's accusations rankled. Yes, considering all things, and in spite of the things that she must always suspect were hidden, her mother had behaved extremely well.

"And above all," Imogen thought, summing it up in terms at once generous and apt, "she has behaved like the gentlewoman that she is. With all her littlenesses, all her lacks, Mamma is essentially that." And the sweetest moments of self-justification were those in which her heart really ached a little for "poor Mamma," moments in which she wondered whether the love that had come to her, in her great sorrow, high among the pine-woods, had ever been her mother's to lose. The wonder made her doubly secure and her mother really piteous.

It was easy, her heart stayed on such heights, to suffer very tolerantly the little stings that flew up to her from the buzzing, startled world. Jack she did

not see again until the day of her wedding, only a month later, and then his face, showing vaguely among a shimmering crowd, seemed but an empty mask of the past. Jack departed early on the morning after her betrothal and it was only lesser wonders that she had to face. It was Mary's wonder that teased most, and Imogen might have been irritated before Mary's stare, a stare that seemed to resume and take in, in the moment of stupefaction, a world of new impressions, but that irritation was a feeling too inappropriate to the *vita nuova*. The memory of Mary staring, with her hair done in a new and becoming way, was to remain for Imogen as a symbol of the vexatious and altered, perhaps the corrupted life, that she was, after all, leaving for good in leaving her native land.

"Sir Basil! You are going to marry Sir Basil, Imogen!" said Mary.

"Yes, dear. Does that surprise you? Haven't you really seen it coming? We fancied that every one must be guessing, while we were finding it out for ourselves," Imogen answered, ever so gently.

"No, I never saw it, never dreamed of it."

"It seemed so impossible? Why, Mary dear?"

"I don't know; he is so much older; he isn't an American; you won't live in your own country; I never imagined you marrying any one but an American."

The deepest wonder, Imogen knew it very well, was the wonder she could not express: I thought that he was in love with your mother. Imogen smiled over the simplicity of the spoken surprises. "I don't think that the question of years separates people so at one as Basil and I," she said. "You would find how little such things meant, Mary mine, if your calm little New England heart ever came to know what a great

love is. As for my country, my country will be my husband's country, but that will not make me love my old home the less, nor make me forget all the things that life has taught me here, any more than I shall be the less myself for being a bigger and better self as his wife." And Imogen looked so uplifted in saying it that poor, bewildered Mary felt that Mrs. Upton, after all, was right, one couldn't tell where rightness was. Such love as Imogen's couldn't be wrong. All the same, she was not sorry that Imogen, all transfigured as she undoubtedly was, should be going very far away. Mary did not feel happy with Imogen any longer.

Rose took the tidings in a very unpleasant manner; but then Rose didn't count; in any circumstances her effrontery went without saying. It was simply a thing to be overlooked, as in this case, when it took the form of absolute silence, a white, smiling silence.

Oddly enough, from the extreme of Rose's anger, came Eddy's chance. She didn't tell Eddy that she saw that his mother was robbed and that, in silence, her heart bled for her; but she did say to him, several days after Imogen's announcement, that, yes, she would.

"I knew that I should be bound to take you some day, and I'd rather do it just now when your mother has quite enough bothers to see to without having your anxieties on her mind! I'll never understand any one so well as I do you, or quarrel with any one so comfortably; and besides," Rose added with characteristic impertinence, "the truth is, my dear, that I want to be your mother's daughter. It's that that's done it. I want to show her how nice a daughter can be to her. I want to take Imogen's place. I'll be an extremely bad wife, Eddy, but a good daughter-in-

law. I adore your mother so much that for her sake I'll put up with you."

Eddy said that she might adore any one as much as she liked so long as she allowed him to put up with her for a life-time. They did understand each other, these too, and Valerie, though a little troubled by the something hard and bright in their warring courtship, something that, she feared, would make their path, though always illuminated, often rough, could welcome her new daughter with real gladness.

" I know that you'll never care for me, as I do for you," said Rose, " and that you will often scold me ; but your scoldings will be my religion. Don't spare them. You are my ideal, you know."

This speech, made in her presence, was, Imogen knew, intended as a cut at herself. She heard it serenely. But Rose was more vexatious than Mary in that she wasn't leaving her behind. Rose was already sparring with Eddy as to when he would take her over to England for a season of hunting. Eddy firmly held himself before her as a poor man and when Rose dangled her own wealth before him remarked that she could, of course, go without him, if she liked. It was evident, in spite of sparring and hardness, that Rose wouldn't like at all ; evident, too, that Eddy would often be wheedled into a costly holiday. Imogen had to foresee a future of tolerance towards Rose. Their worlds would not do more than merge here and there. Imogen had, already, very distinct ideas as to her new world. It hovered as important and political ; the business of Rose's world would be its relaxation only. For Imogen would never change colours and her frown for mere fashion would be as sad as ever. She was not to change, she was only to intensify, to become " bigger and better."

And this essential stability was not contradicted by the fact that, in one or two instances, she found herself developing. She was glad, and in the presence of Mrs. Wake, gravely to renounce past errors as to the English people. Since coming to know Basil, typical of his race, its flower, as he was, she had come to see how far deeper in many respects, how far more evolved that English character was than their own, "their," now, signifying, "your." "You really saw that before I did, dear Mrs. Wake," said Imogen.

Already Imogen identified herself with her future husband so that the defects of the younger civilization seemed no longer her affair, except in so far as her understanding of them, her love of her dear country, and her new enlightenments, made her the more eager to help. And then they were all of the same race; she was very insistent on that; it was merely that the branch to which she now belonged was a "bigger and better" branch. Imogen was none the less a good American for becoming so devoutly English. From her knowledge of the younger, more ardent, civilization, her long training in its noblest school, she could help the old in many ways. England, in these respects, was like her Basil, before she had wakened him. Imogen felt that England, too, needed her. And there was undoubtedly a satisfaction in flashing that new world of hers, so large, so in need of her, in flashing it, like a bright, and, it was to be hoped, a somewhat dazzling object, before the vexatiously imperturbable eyes of Mrs. Wake. Mrs. Wake's dry smile of congratulation had been almost as unpleasant as Rose's silence.

From Miss Bocock there was neither smile, nor sting, nor silence to endure. Miss Bocock had suspected nothing, either on the mother's side or on the daughter's,

and took the announcement very placidly. " Indeed. Really. How very nice. Accept my congratulations," were her comments. Imogen at once asked her to spend a week-end at Thremdon Priory next spring and Miss Bocock in just the same way said, " Thanks. That will be very nice. I've never stayed there." There was still a subtle irritation in the fact that while Miss Bocock now accepted her, in the order of things, as one of the " county people," as the gracious mistress of Thremdon Priory, as very much above a country doctor's family, she didn't seem to regard her with any more interest or respect as an individual.

These, after all, were the superficialities of the situation ; its deeper aspects were, Imogen felt, as yet unfaced. Her mother seemed quite content to et Imogen's silence stand for retractation, and apology, quite willing to go on, for the little further that they had to go together, in an ambiguous relation. This was, indeed, Imogen felt, her mother's strength ; she could, apparently, put up with any amount of ambiguity, and probably looked upon it as an essential part of life. Perhaps, and here Imogen was conscious of a twinge of anxiety, she put up with it so quietly because she didn't recognize it in herself, in her own motives and actions ; and this thought teased at Imogen until she determined that she must stand forth in the light and show her mother that she, too, was self-assured and she, too, magnanimous.

She armed herself for the task by a little talk with Sir Basil, the nearest approach they ever allowed themselves to the delicate complexities in which they had come to recognize each other and out of which, to a certain extent, they had had to fight their way to the present harmony. She was with him, again, among

the laurels, a favourite place with them, and Imogen sat on her former ledge of sunny rock, Sir Basil extended beside her on the moss. She had been reading Emerson to him and when the essay was finished and she had talked to him a little about the "over-soul"—dear Basil's recollections of metaphysics were very confused—she presently said to him, letting her hand slide into his while she spoke: "Basil, dearest, I want to ask you something, and you must answer very truly, for you need never fear that I would flinch from any truth. Tell me, did you ever—ever care for Mamma?"

Sir Basil, his hat tilted over his eyes, grew very red and looked down at the moss for some moments without replying.

"Of course I know that, in some sense, you did care," said Imogen, a faint tremble in her voice, a tremble that, in its sweet acquiescence to something that was hurting her, touched him infinitely; "I know, too, that there are loves and loves. I know that anything you may have felt for Mamma is as different from what you feel for me as lamplight is from daylight. I won't speak of it, ever, again, dear Basil; but for this once let me see clearly what was in your past."

"I did care for her," Sir Basil jerked out at that, "quite tremendously, until I saw you. She will always be a dear friend, one of the dearest, most charming people I've ever known. And no, it wasn't like lamplight, you know"—something in that analogy was so hurting Sir Basil that it made him, for a moment, forget his darling's hurt—"that wasn't it. Though, it's quite true, you're like daylight."

"And—and—she?" Imogen accepted the restatement, though her voice trembled a little more.

He now looked up at her, a clear, blue ray from his honest eyes. "Well, there, you know, it *has* been a relief. I could never tell, in the past; she showed me nothing, except that friendship; but since she has been free, since I've seen her over here, she has shown me quite clearly, that it was, on her side, only that."

Imogen was silent for a long time. She didn't "know" at all. And there was a great deal to accept, more, oddly enough, that she had ever faced. She had always believed that it had been like lamplight to daylight. But, whatever it had been, the day had conquered it. And how dear, how noble of her lover to show, so unfalteringly, his loyalty to the past. It was with a sigh made up of many satisfactions that she said at last: "Dear Mamma; I am so glad that I took nothing she cared for from her."

It was on that afternoon that she found her time for "standing forth in the light" before her mother. She didn't want it to be indoors; she felt, vaguely, that four walls would make them too intimate, as it were, shut them into their mutual consciousness too closely. So that when she saw her mother, after tea, watering and gathering her flowers at the edge of the wood, she went out to her, across the grass, sweet and mild in the long white dress that she had worn since joy had come to her.

She wished to be very direct, very simple, very sweet.

"Mamma darling," she said, standing there beside her while Valerie, after a quiet glance up at her, continued to cut her roses, "I want to say something to you. This seems such a beautiful time to say *real* things in, doesn't it, this beautiful late afternoon hour. I've wanted to say it since the other night when, through poor Jack's folly of anger and blindness, we

were all put into such an ugly muddle, at such ugly cross-purposes."

She paused here and Valerie, giving neither assent nor negation, said: "Yes, Imogen?"

"I want to say to you that I am sorry, Mamma dear," Imogen spoke gravely and with emphasis; "sorry, in the first place, that I should so have misjudged you as to imagine that—at your time of life and after your sobering experience of life—you were involved in a love affair. I see, now, what a wrong that was to do to you—to your dignity, your sense of right and fitness. And I'm sorrier that I should have thought you capable of seconding Jack's attempts to keep from me a love that was mine. The first mistake led to the second. I had heard your friends conjecturing as to your feeling for Basil and the pain of suspecting that of you—my father's new-made widow—led me astray. I think that in any great new experience one's whole nature is perhaps a little off-balance, confused. I had suffered so much, in many ways—*his* death, Jack's unworthiness, this fear for you, and then, in these last days, for what you know, Mamma, for *him*, because of *him* my father, a suffering that no joy will ever efface—that I was made, I think, for a little time, a stranger to myself. And then came love, wonderful love, and it shook my nature to its depths. I was dazzled, torn, tempest-tossed; I did not see clearly. Let that be my excuse."

Valerie still stooped over her roses, her fingers delicately, accurately busy and her face, under the broad brim of her hat, hidden.

Again Imogen paused, the rhythm of her words, like an echo of his voice in her own, bringing a sudden, sharp, sweet reminiscence of her father so that the tears had

risen to her eyes in hearing herself. And again, for all reply, her mother once more said only : " Yes, Imogen."

It was not the reply she had expected, not the reply that she had a right to expect, and, even out there, with the flowers, so impersonally lovely, about them, the late radiance softly bathing them, as if in rays of forgiveness and mild pity, even with the tears, evidences of sorrow and magnanimity, in her eyes, Imogen felt a little at a loss, a little confused.

" That is all, Mamma," she said, " just that I am sorry, and that I want you to feel, in spite of all the sad, the tragic things that there have been between us, that my deep love for you is there, and that you must trust it always."

There was another silence, Valerie stooping to her flowers, mysterious, ambiguous indeed, in her shadow, her silence.

Imogen, for all the glory of her mood, felt a thrill of anger and the reminiscence that came to her now was of her father's pain, his familiar pain, for such shadows, such silences, such blights cast upon his highest impulses. " I hope, Mamma, that you will always trust my love," she said, mastering the rising of her resentment.

And once more came the monotonous answer, but given this time with a new note : " Yes, Imogen," her mother replied, " you may always trust my love."

She rose at that and her eyes passed swiftly across her daughter's face, swiftly and calmly. She was a little flushed, but that might have been from the long bending over the flowers ; and if it was a juggling dexterity that she used, she had used it indeed so dexterously that it seemed impossible to say anything more. Imogen could find no words in which to set the turned tables straight.

She had imagined their little scene ending very beautifully in a grave embrace and kiss; but no opportunity was given her for this final demonstration of her spirit of charity. Her mother gathered up her scissors, her watering-pot, her trowel, and handing Imogen the filled basket of roses said, "Will you carry these for me, my dear?"

The tone of quiet, everyday kindness dispelled all glory and set a lower standard. Here, at this place, very much on the earth, Imogen could always find her, it seemed to say. It said nothing else.

Yet Imogen knew, as she walked back beside her mother, knew quite as well as if her mother had spoken the words, that her proffered love had not been trusted, that she had been penetrated, judged, and, in some irresistible way, a way that brought no punishment and no reproof, nor even any lessening of affection, condemned. Her mother still loved her, that was the helpless conviction that settled upon her, but it was as a child, not as a personality, that she was loved, very much as Miss Bocock respected her as the mistress of Thremdon Priory and not at all on her own account; but her mother, too, for all her quiet, and all her kindness, thought her "self-centred, self-righteous, cold-hearted," and—Imogen, in a sharp pang of insight, saw it all—because of that would not attempt any soul-stirring appeal or arraignment. She knew too well with what weapons of spiritual assurance she would be met.

It was in silence, while they walked side by side, the basket of roses between them, that Imogen fiercely seized these arms, fiercely parried the unuttered arraignment, and, more fiercely, the unuttered love.

She could claim no verbal victory, she had endured no

verbal defeat ; it was she herself who had forced this issue upon a situation that her mother would have been content to leave undefined. Her mother would never fix blame, her mother would never humiliate ; but, she had found it to her own cost—though the cost was as light as her mother could make it—she would not consent to be placed where Imogen had wished to place her. Let it be so, then, let it end on this note of seeming harmony and of silent discord ; it was her mother's act, not her own. Truth was in her and had made its appeal once more ; once more deep had called unto deep only to find shallowness. For spiritual shallowness there must be where such an appeal as hers could be so rejected and so misunderstood. She was angry, sore, vindictive, though her sharp insight did not reach so far as to tell her this ; and if it told her that she was wounded to the quick, her final refuge was in the thought that she was soon to leave behind her such judgments and such loves for ever.

CHAPTER XXX

IT was on a late October day that Jack Pennington rode over the hills to Valerie's summer home.

Two months were gone since Imogen's reporter-haunted nuptials had been celebrated in the bland little country church that raised its white steeple from the woodlands. Jack had been present at them; decency had made that necessary, and a certain grimness in his aspect was easily to be interpreted in a dismal, defeated rival. It was as such, he knew, that he was seen there.

It had been a funny wedding, to say the least of it. In watching it from the white-wreathed chancel he had thought of Valerie's pronouncement: "Imogen is one of the people who make the world go round." The world in every phase had been represented there, from the British ambassador and the Langleys to the East End club girls—brought up from New York by special train—and a flourishing consignment of cripples and nurses. Here and there in her path Imogen might meet the blankness of a Miss Bocock, the irony of a Mrs. Wake, a disillusion like Mary's, an insight like his own; but the great world, in its aspect of power and simplicity, would be with her always. He had realized Imogen's capacity as never before when he saw the cohorts of her friends and followers overflow the church.

She had been a fitting centre to it all, though the centre, for Jack, was Valerie, exquisite, mildly radiant,

not a hint on her of dispossession or of doom ; Imogen, white rapt and grave, had looked almost as wonderful as on the day when she had first dawned upon Sir Basil's vision.

Jack, watching her uplifted profile as she stood at the altar-rail, found himself trivially, spitefully, irrelevantly murmuring : " Her nose *is* too small." And yet she looked more than ever like a Botticelli Madonna.

Rose and Eddy were to be married that winter in New York, a gigantic opportunity for the newspapers, for already half the world seemed trooping to the festivities. Afterwards, with old-fashioned Americanism, they would live in quite a little house and try to forget about Rose's fortune until Eddy made his.

Valerie was to have none of the bother of this wedding. Mrs. Packer, a mournful, jewelled, faded little beauty, was well fitted to cope with such emergencies. Her secretaries sat already with pens poised.

Imogen's wedding had kept her mother working like a galley slave, so Rose told Jack, with the familiarity that was now justifiable in one who was almost of the family, and that Eddy had told her, with much disgust in his demeanour, that financing it had eaten pretty deeply into his mother's shrunken means. Rose made no open denunciation ; no more than any one else could she guess from Jack's silence what his feeling about Imogen might really be. But she was sure that he was well *over* her, and that, above all, he was one of the elect who *saw* Mrs. Upton ; she could allow herself a musing survey of all that the mother had done for the daughter, adding, and it was really with a wish for strict justice : " Of course Imogen never had any idea of money and she'll never realize what she cost." In another and a deeper sense it might be that that was

the kindest as well as the truest thing to say of Imogen.

Since the wedding Valerie had been staying quietly at the little house among the hills, alone for the most part, though Mrs. Wake was often with her, and the Pakenhams had paid her a visit on their way back to England. Now Mrs. Wake was gone home to New York and Valerie herself was leaving in a few days. Jack, spending a week-end with friends not beyond riding distance, felt that he must see her again in the surroundings where he had come to know her so well and to know himself so changed.

He rode over the crests of the hills in the flaming, aromatic woods. The fallen leaves paved his way with gold. In the deep distances before him a still, blue haze, like the bloom on ripe grape-clusters, lay over the purples of the lower ranges. Above, about, before him was the blue sky of the wonderful American "fall," high, clear, crystalline. The air was an elixir. Jack's eyes were for all this beauty. "The vast, unconscious scenery of my land," was the line that drifted in his thoughts, his own contemplation, seeming as vast and as unperplexed. But under his calm, his happy sadness, that, too, seemed a part of the day, ran, like the inner echo to the air's intoxication, a stream of deep, still excitement.

He did not think directly of Valerie; but vague pictures passed, phantom-like, before his mind. He saw her in her garden, gathering late flowers; he saw her reading under the fringe of vine-leaves and tendrils; he saw her again in the wintry New York of snow and sunlight, or smiling down from the high-decked steamer against a sky of frosty rose; he saw her on all these backgrounds of the land he so loved. But—oh, it was here that the under-current, the stream

of excitement seemed to rise, foaming, circling, submerging him, choking him with tides of grief and desolation—he saw her, too, in that land she loved; not in the Surrey garden—no, no, that was shut to her for ever—but in some other, some distant garden, high-walled, the pale gold and grey of an autumnal sunset over its purpling bricks, or on a flower-dappled common in Spring, or in Spring woods filled with wild hyacinth and primroses. He could see her, place her, over there, far, far away, from his country—and from him. It was after the last sharp trot, the last leisurely uphill canter, on the bordering, leaf-strewn grass of the winding road, when the white walls and grey roof of the little house showed among the trees, that the whole under-current seemed to centre in a knot of suffocating expectancy and pain.

And Valerie, while Jack so rode, so approached her, was enacting one of his visions. She had spent the afternoon in her garden, digging, planting, "messing about," as she expressed it, very happily among her borders, where late flowers, purple and white and gold, still bloomed. She was planning all sorts of things for her garden, a row of double-cherry trees to stand at the edges of the woods and be symbols of paradise in Spring. Little almond trees, too, frail sprays of pink on a Spring sky, and quince trees that would show in autumn among ample foliage the pale gold of their softly furred fruit. She wanted Spring flowers to run back far into the woods and climbing roses and honeysuckle to make summer delicious among the vines of the verandah. The afternoon, full of such projects, passed pleasantly and when she came in and dressed for her solitary tea she felt pleasantly tired. She walked up and down the drawing-

room, its white walls warm with the reflections of outer sunlight, listening vaguely to the long trail of her black teagown behind her, looking vaguely from the open windows at the purple distances set in their nearer waves of flame.

At the end of the room, before the austere little chimney-piece, she paused presently to look at herself in the austere little mirror with its compartments of old gilt—at herself, the illuminated white of the room reflected behind her. A narrow crystal vase mirrored itself beside her leaning arm, and its one tall rose, set among green leaves and russet stems and thorns, spread depths of colour near her cheek. Valerie's eyes went from her face to the rose. The rose was fresh, glowing, perfect. Her face, lovely still, was faded.

She stood there, leaning beside the flower, the fingers of her supporting hand sunken deep in the chestnut masses of her hair, and noted, gravely, earnestly, the delicate signs and seals of stealing age. Never, never again would her face be like the rose, young, fresh, perfect. And she herself was no longer young; in her heart she knew the stillness, the droop, the peace—almost the peace—of softly falling petals.

How young she had been, how lovely, how full of sweetness. That was the thought that pierced her suddenly, the thought of wasted sweetness, unrecorded beauty, youth unnoted, unloved, all to go, to pass away for ever. It seemed hardly for herself, she grieved, but for the doom of all youth and loveliness, for the fleeting, the impermanence of life. The vision of herself passed to a vision of the other roses, the drooping, the doomed, scattering their petals in the chill breeze of coming winter.

"Poor things," was her thought—her own self-pity

had part only in its inclusiveness—"Summer is over for us all."

And with the thought, girlishly, still girlishly, she hid her face upon her arms as she stood there, murmuring: "Ah, I hate, I hate getting old."

A step at the door roused her. She turned to see Jack entering.

Jack looked very nice in the tans and russets of his riding tweeds and gaiters. The chill air had brought a clear colour to his cheeks; the pale gold of his hair, one unruly lock, as usual, over-long, lying across his forehead, shone like sunlight; his grey eyes looked as deep and limpid as a mountain pool.

Valerie was very, very glad to see him. He embodied the elixir, the colour, the freshness of the world to-day: and oh, how young—how young—how fortunately, beautifully young he looked; that was the thought with which she met him as she turned from the contrasting picture of the glass.

She gave him her hands in welcome, and they sat down near a window where the sunlight fell upon them and the breeze blew in upon them, she on a little sofa, among chintz cushions, he on a low chair beside her; and in Jack, as he talked with her, that excitement, that pain and expectancy grew. The summer was over and soon, it must be, she would go. With a wave of sadness that sucked him back and swept him forward in a long, sure ache, came the deeper knowledge of his own desolation. But, sitting there beside her in the October sunlight, feeling, with the instinct, so quick, so sensitive in him, that it was in sadness he had found her, the desolation wasn't so much for himself as for her. He, too, seeing her face with the blooming rose beside it, had known her piercing thought.

She was going; but in other senses, too. She had begun to go; and all the sacrifices, the relinquishments, the acceptances of the summer, were the first steps of her departure. She had done with things and he, who had not yet done with them, was left behind. Already the signs of distance were upon her—he saw them as she had seen them—the signs of her distance from the world of youth, of hope, of effort.

A thin veil, like the sad-sweet haze over the purpling hills wavered between them, the veil that, for all its melting elusiveness, parts implacably one generation from another. Its dimness seemed to rest on her bright hair and to hover in her bright eyes, to soften, as with a faint melancholy, the brightness of her smile. And it was as if he saw her, with a little sigh, unclasp her hands, hands that had clung to what she fancied to be still her share of life—unclasp her hands, look round her with a slight amaze at the changed season where she found herself, and, after the soundless pause of recognition, bend her head consentingly to the quiet, obliterating snows of age. And once more the change in him, his own initiation to subtler standards, appeared in this, that when the old, moral self, still over-glib with its assurances, tried to urge upon him that all was for the best in a wonderful world, ventured to murmur an axiom or so as to the grace, the dignity, the added spiritual significance of old age, the new self, awakened to tragedy, turned angry eyes upon that vision of the rose in the devastated garden, and once more muttered, in silence: "Damn!"

They had talked of the past and of the coming marriage, very superficially, dealing only with the outer aspects of things; they had talked of his summer wanderings and of the Pakenhams' visit to Vermont. She had given

him tea and she had told him of her plans for the winter; she had given up the New York house and had taken a little flat, near Mrs. Wake's, that she was going to move to in a few days now. And Jack said at last, feeling that with the words he dived from shallows into deeps: "And—when are you going back?—back to England?"

"Going back?" She repeated his words vaguely.

"Yes; to where you've always liked to live."

"Yes; I liked living there," said Valerie, still with vagueness in her contemplative "yes."

"And still like it."

She seemed to consider. "Things have changed, you know. It was change I used to want. I looked for it, perhaps mistakenly. Now it has come of itself, and I feel a great unwillingness to move on again."

The poignant vision of something bruised, dimmed, listless, was with him and it was odd to hear himself urging: "But in the meantime, you, too, have changed. The whole thing over here, the thing we so care for, isn't yours. You don't really care about it much, if at all. It doesn't really please you. It gives you with effort what you can get with ease, over there, and it must jar on you often. We are young; crude; all the over-obvious things that are always said of us; our enthusiasms are too facile; our standards of achievement, in the things you care for, rather second-rate—oh, you know well enough what I mean. We are not crystallized yet into a shape that's really comfortable for a person like you: perhaps we never shall be; perhaps I hope we never shall be. So why shouldn't you go to a place where you can have all the things you like."

She listened to him in silence, with, at the end, a

slight smile for the exactitude of his: "Perhaps I hope we never shall be;" and she paused now as if his portrayal of her own wants required consideration. "Perhaps," she said at length, "perhaps I never cared so much about all those things."

"Oh, but you do," said Jack, with conviction.

"You mean, I suppose, all the things people over here go away so much to get. No, I don't think so. It was never really that. I don't think"—and she seemed to be thinking it out for herself as well as for him—"that I've ever been so conscious of standards—crystallizations—the relative values and forms of things. What I wanted was freedom. Not that I was ever oppressed or ill-treated, far from it; but I was too uncomfortable. I was like a bird forced to live like a fish, or perhaps we had better say, like a fish forced to live like a bird. That was why I went. I couldn't breathe. And, yes, I like the life over there. It's very easy and gliding; it protects you from jars; it gives you beauty for the asking; here we have to make it as a rule. I like the people, too, and their unconsciousness. People like us, you know, Jack, for what is conscious in us, and it's so much that there's hardly a bit of us that isn't conscious. We know our way all over ourselves, as it were, and can put all of ourselves into the window if we want some one else to know us. It is different with them. One often likes them for their unconsciousness, for all the things behind the window, all the things they know nothing at all about, the things that are instinctive, background things. It makes a more peaceful feeling. One can wander about dim rooms, as it were, and rest in them; one doesn't have to recognize and respond so much. Yes, I shall miss it all, in a great many

ways. But I like it here too. For one thing there is a great deal more to do."

Jack, in some bewilderment, was grasping at clues. One was that, as he had long ago learned of her, she was incapable of phrases, even when they were sincere: incapable of dramatising herself, even if her situation lent itself to tragic interpretations. Uncomfortable? —was that all that she found to say of her life, her suffocating life, among the fishes? She could put it aside with that. And as for the rest, he realized suddenly, with a new illumination—at what a late date it was for him to reach it, he, who had thought that he knew her so well!—that she cared less, in reality, for all those "things" lacking in the life of her native land than the bulk of her conscious, anxious countrymen. Cared not enough, his old self of judgment and moral appraisement would have pronounced. She wasn't intellectual, nor was she aesthetic, that was the funny part of it—she, a person whose whole being diffused a sense of completeness that was like a perfume. Art, culture, a complicated social life, to be on the top of things as it were, were not the objects of her desire. It was indeed her indifference to them, her independence of them, that made her, for his wider consciousness, oddly un-American.

In the midst of bewilderment and illumination one thing stood clear, a trembling joy; he had to make assurance doubly sure. "If you are not going away, what *will* you do?"

"I don't know"—he would, once, have rebuked as indolent the smile with which she said it—"I wasn't thinking of anything definite, for myself. I'll watch other people "do," you, for instance, Jack. I shall spend most of my time here in the country:

New York is so expensive. I shall garden : wait till you see what I make of this in a few years' time. I shall look after Rose and Eddy—at a tactful distance."

"But your wider life? Your many friends, over there?" Jack still protested, fearing that he saw more clearly than she to what an obliteration a widow with a tiny, crippled fortune was consigning herself in this country of the young and striving. "You need gaiety, brilliancy, big, bright vistas." It was strange to hear himself urging his thought for her against that inner throb.

Again she gave him her grave, brief smile. "You forget, Jack, that I'm—'cured.' I'm quite old enough not to mind giving up."

The warm, consoling assurance was with him, of her presence near his life ; but under it the excitement, the pain, had so risen that he wondered if she did not read them in his eyes.

The evening was growing late ; the sky had turned to a pale, translucent gold, streaked, over the horizon, by thin, cold, lilac-coloured clouds. He must go, leaving her there alone, and, in leaving her, he would leave something else for ever. For it was now, as the veil fell over her, as the evening fell over the wide earth, it was now or never that he could receive his last illumination. He hardly saw clearly what that might be ; it wavered like a hovering light behind the mist.

He rose and walked up and down the room a little, pausing to look from the windows at the golden sky, pausing to look, now and then, at her, sitting there in her long, black dress, vaguely shadowed on the outer light, smiling, tranquil, yet so sad.

"Well, our summer is at an end," he said, turning

at last from the window. "The air has a frosty tang already. I suppose I must be off. I shall not see you again until New York. I'm glad—I'm glad that you are to be there"—and now he stammered, suddenly, a little—"more glad than I can say."

"Thanks, Jack," she answered, her eyes fondly dwelling on him. "You are one of the things I would not like to leave."

Again he walked up and down, and seemed to hear the steady flow of that still, deep excitement. Why, above it, should he say silly, meaningless words, that were like a bridge thrown over it to lead him from her? "I want to tell you one thing, just one, before I go," he said. He knew that, with his sudden resolution, his voice had changed and, to quiet himself, he stood before her and put both hands on the back of a chair that was between them. He couldn't go on building that bridge. He must dare something, even if something else he must not dare—unless, unless she let him. "I must tell you that you are the most enchanting person I have ever known."

She looked at him quietly, though she was startled, not quite understanding, and she said a little sadly: "Only that, Jack?"

"Yes, only that, for you, because you don't need the trite, obvious labels that one affixes to other people. You don't need me to say that you are good or true or brave; it's like a delicate seal that comprises and expresses everything—the trite things and the strange, lovely things—when I say that you are enchanting." He held his mind, so conscious, under the words, of what he must not say, to the intellectual preoccupation of making her see, at all events, just what the words he could say meant.

But as his voice rang, tense, vibrant as a tightened cord in the still room, as his eyes sank into hers, Valerie felt in her own dying youth the sudden echo to all he dared not say.

She had never before seen it, quick as she was to see the meaning behind words and looks. She suspected that he also had never seen it clearly till now.

Other claims had dropped from them; the world was gone; they were alone, his eyes on hers; and between them was the magic of life.

Yes, she had it still, the gift, the compelling charm. His eyes in their young strength and fear and adoration called to her life, and with a touch, a look, she could bring to it this renewal and this solace. And, behind her sorrow, her veil, her relinquishment, Valerie was deeply thrilled.

The thrill went through her, but even while she knew it, it hardly moved her. No; the relinquishment had been too deep. She had lost for ever, in losing the other. That had been to turn her back on life or, rather, to see it turn its back on her, for ever. Not without an ugly crash of inner, twisted discord could she step once more from the place of snow, or hold out her hand to love.

All his life was before him but for her—for her it was finished. And as she mastered the thrill, as she turned from the vision of what his eyes besought and promised, a flow of pity, pity for his youth and pain and for all the long way he was yet to go, filled her, bringing peace, even while the sweetness of the unsought, undreamed of offering made her smile again, a trembling smile.

"Dear Jack, thank you," she said.

Suddenly, before her smile, her look, he flushed deeply, taking from her eyes what his own full meaning

had been. Already it was in the past, the still-born hope; it was dead before he gazed upon it; but he must hear the death-warrant from her lips, it was not enough to see it, so gentle, so pitiful, so loving, in her eyes; and he heard himself stammering: "You—you haven't anything else you can say to me?"

She had found her answer in a moment, and now indeed she was at the helm, steering them both past white shores set in such depths of magical blue, white shores where sirens sang. Never could they land there, never listen to the song. And already she seemed to hear it, as if from a far distance, ringing, sharp and strange with the swiftness of their flight, as she replied: "Nothing else, dear Jack, except that I wish you were my son."

The enchanted island had sunk behind the horizon. They were landed, and on the safest shores. She knew that she had achieved her own place and that from it, secure, above him, the veil between them, her smile was the smile of motherhood. To smile so was to put before him, finally, the fact that her enchantment contradicted and helplessly lured him to forget. She would never forget it now, nor could he forget it. She was Imogen's mother, and she was old enough to be his.

From her smile, her eyes, common sense flooded Jack, kind, yet stinging, too, savouring of a rescue from some danger—not his, not his—his was none of the common sense—but hers. He might, had she let him, have so dislocated her life.

He was scarlet, stammering. He knew that he hid nothing from her now, that he had no wish to hide anything, no need to hide anything. Those benign, maternal eyes would understand. And he smiled, too,

but also with a trembling smile, as he reached out to her hand, holding it tightly and saying, gazing at her : "I love you so."

Her hand held his, in farewell now, but her look up at him promised everything, everything for the future—except the one now shrouded thing. "And I love you, dear Jack," she said. "You have taken the place of—almost everything."

And then, for she saw the tears in his eyes, and knew that his heart was bleeding, not for himself alone, she rose and took his head between her hands, and, like a mother, kissed him above his eyes.

* * * * *

When he had left her, and they said no further word, Valerie did not again relapse into a despondent attitude.

The sky was like a deep rose, soft, dim, dying, and the colour of the afterglow filled the room.

Standing at the window she breathed in the keen, sweet air and looked from the dying day down to her garden.

She had watched Jack disappear among the trees, waving to him, and her heart followed his aching heart with comprehending pity. But, from her conquest of the thrill, a clear, contemplative insight was left with her, so that looking out over the lives she was to watch, she felt herself, for all her sadness, a merry if a serious Fate, mingling the threads of others' fortunes with a benignant hand.

Imogen's threads had snapped off sharply. Imogen would be the better pleased that the Surrey cottage should know her no more. The pang for the wrecking of all maternal hope passed strangely into a deeper pang for all that the Surrey cottage stood

for in her life, all the things that she had left to come to Imogen. She remembered; and, for a moment, the old vortex of whirling anguish almost engulfed her. The pang of that parting only long years could deaden. She would not dwell on that. Eddy and Rose: to turn to them was to feel almost gay; Jack and Mary: yes, on these last names her thoughts lingered, her gaze for them held tender presages. That must be. Jack would not know how her maternal solicitude was to encompass him and mould his way. If the benignant Fate saw clearly, Jack and Mary were to marry. Strange that it should not be from anything of her own that the deepest call upon her fostering tenderness came. She wasn't needed by anything of her own. This was the tragedy of her life that, more than youth passed and love renounced, seemed to drift snows upon her.

But, beyond the personal pang and failure, she could look down at her garden and out at the quiet evening vistas. The very flowers seemed to smile gentle promises and to murmur that, after all, rather than bitterness, failure was to bring humble peace.

Leaning her head against the window, where in the breeze the curtains softly flapped, she looked out at the tranquil twilight, contented to be sad.

"Friends will pay me visits," she said to herself; "I will garden and learn a new language. I will read a great many books." And, with a sense of happy daring, not rebuked by reason, she could add, thinking of the mingled threads: "I will have them often here to stay with me, and, perhaps, they will let me spoil the babies."

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